

LIZ GERARD COVID'S DOUBLESPEAK AND DOUBLE STANDARDS

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IGNITED STATES



JOHN KAMPFNER AND BONNIE GREER ON TRUMP'S DEADLY GAME

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Now we are all Hongkongers

Andrew Adonis



Just as we were all Berliners during Stalin's blockade of 1948 and Khrushchev's construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, so we are all Hongkongers today.

The fate of Hong Kong and its people under Xi Jinping is a defining moment for freedom. If we fail them, western civilisation fails too, and Europe's own liberty and security are jeopardised.

The parallel with Stalin is eerie and compelling, as is the analogy of the Cold War which became the defining struggle of the west when the Soviet dictator attempted to seize West Berlin in June 1948 by closing its land borders with surrounding Russian-controlled East Germany.

Thanks to Britain's stalwart anti-Stalinist foreign secretary Ernie Bevin, and his equally resolute American counterpart General George Marshall, there was a renewed D-Day spirit. British and American forces worked as one, sustaining a dramatic 11-month airlift of food, fuel and people. It was heroism, risk and mission to match the greatest moments in history.

Up to 7,000 tons of goods were flown into West Berlin every day for 323 days to supply the two million inhabitants. Bevin and prime minister Attlee's key decision, to allow the US to station in Britain B-29 bombers that were capable of carrying atomic weapons, convinced Stalin of the British-American determination to stay in Berlin. After weeks when the world held its breath, Stalin did not interfere with the airlift and did not escalate to war. Stalin never attempted another coup in western Europe in his last five years of life and megalomania.

Parallels are never exact. Xi is currently a less rapacious tyrant than

Stalin. There is no question of military resistance, by conventional arms let alone nuclear, to any Chinese army or judicial incursion into Hong Kong.

However, Xi's transition to oppressor of Hong Kong and potentially also Taiwan, and purveyor of pandemics to the globe, where only a short while ago he was trusted supplier of limitless cheap goods to the west, is uncannily like Stalin's swift transition from cuddly wartime Uncle Joe to peacetime Russian Bear. In both cases, crises underpinned by ideology and paranoia are driving the change.

Similarly, while Hong Kong's territory cannot be protected from a mainland invasion or takeover, there can once again be an 'airlift' in the event of a 'blockade.' This time, it will need to be the people who are airlifted out, not the goods which are airlifted in. Or at any rate, as many of the people as wish to leave.

Don't succumb to fainthearts: such an airlift is probably viable. There are 7.5 million Hongkongers, a population not much larger than that of Denmark, Finland and Slovakia. Provided a group of western nations agree to underwrite the citizenship of these 7.5 million, offering them immediate safe haven in the event of oppression, then an 'airlift' is probably viable, assuming that Xi would not risk a complete breakdown in relations with the west by stopping them from leaving.

Britain must take the lead by virtue of inherited position. I am not a great admirer of foreign secretary Dominic Raab, but he appears to have taken the first decisive step by making two major and under-appreciated announcements in the last week: first, that the right to British National Overseas passports will be potentially extended from the existing 350,000 holders to about half of all Hongkongers; and secondly that these passports, which do not give a right of residence in Britain, will nonetheless give an automatic right to a one-year visa. This would amount to residency in the event of the city being subjugated.

British diplomacy now has a straightforward goal: to ensure that all 7.5 million Hongkongers have equivalent rights in a western nation, which means engaging the Commonwealth and the European Union in the mother of diplomacy. This is what Bevin and Marshall would have done, and this alone might act as a sufficient deterrent to further encroachment on Hong Kong by Xi.

Hong Kong alone will not determine the future relations of China and the west. But like Berlin in 1948/9, it will be decisive in demonstrating resolve and self-belief in facing up to the new Chinese dragon. Which is why, in this moment of peril, we must not flinch.

“ British diplomacy now has a straightforward goal: to ensure that all 7.5 million Hongkongers have equivalent rights in a western nation

10-11 PLAYED FOR FOOLS

An angry essay on how the government has treated its people during the pandemic

BY LIZ GERARD

22 BORIS THE ROAD HOG

Looking for indicators in the prime minister's execrable motoring book

BY NICK HOLLAND



23-26 NATIONALIST AWAKENING

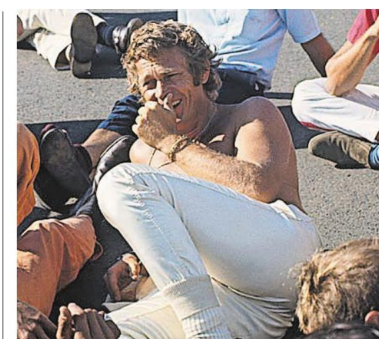
How Britain's 'nats' movements went from Eurosceptics to Europhiles

BY SEAN MELEADY

28-29 EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

Mandu Reid, new leader of the Women's Equality Party, on the movement's big future

BY MATT WITHERS



33-39 MCQUEEN'S MASTERPIECE

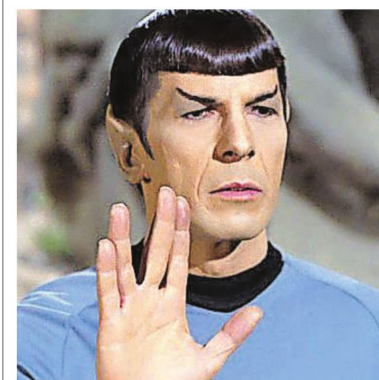
The many chicanes and breakdowns behind the 1971 Steve McQueen classic, *Le Mans*

BY MICK O'HARE

40-41 MUSICAL TWINS

The two capital cities separated by a river but united in music

BY SOPHIA DEBOICK



45 BOLDLY GOING

Time to defiantly tear up the rules on split infinitives

BY PETER TRUDGILL

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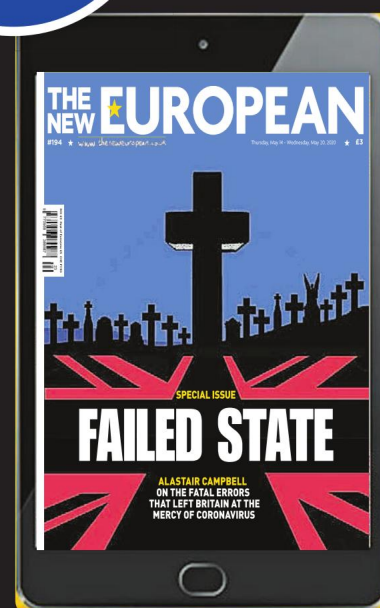
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AGENDA

Disunited States threaten

The worst is yet to come for the US, warns JOHN KAMPFNER, and its possible demise threatens the entire western order



Is America a failed state? I ask the question not to gloat. When the beacon of the free world descends into violence, sickness, division and impoverishment, when it suffers from an abandonment of leadership, when the basic functions of state and service collapse, the consequences go far beyond its borders.

For a century or more the United States has been the lodestar. As the poem at the Statue of Liberty proclaims: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free." Its entrepreneurialism attracted the ambitious; its free spirit provided hope for those constrained by the old world. Its culture became everyone's culture.

Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal set the standard for economic revival. America's entry into the Second World War turned the tide against fascism. John F Kennedy's visit to Berlin galvanised the city on the frontline of the Cold War.

Now all one hears about is the 100,000 dead and rising and the refrigerated trucks waiting to load more corpses. Or this on the early days of the pandemic: "Civilians took out their sewing machines to try to keep ill-equipped hospital workers healthy and their patients alive. Russia, Taiwan and the United Nations sent humanitarian aid to the world's richest power – a beggar

nation in utter chaos." So writes George Packer in the latest issue of *Atlantic*.

His excoriating essay was published before the death of George Floyd, as he was being arrested by police officers in Minneapolis, and the violent protests that have followed in dozens of cities.

In a programme I am presenting on BBC Radio 4, I look at the effects of Covid-19 on authoritarian regimes, populists and still-functioning democracies.

There is no need here to rehearse the record of Donald J Trump. But it is important to look ahead to the vital next six months. That the president has stoked the racial tensions comes as no surprise.

It is part instinct, part political calculation. Everything hangs on the November election. For the first time, many people fear for the very future of the political system.

Will Trump try to cancel or postpone the vote, citing the pandemic? After all, at least 62 countries have called off elections or referendums in the three months from the middle of February.

One person's political whim is another's act of responsible risk management. When Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law, chief adviser and monument to nepotism and dilettantism, suggested a few weeks ago that he couldn't commit one way or the other to the elections going ahead on time, he was quickly corrected by the White House.

This was not a slip of the tongue, rather a classic case of Trump flying a kite – raising a difficult issue through a proxy to see how it goes down with the public.

Even if the election goes ahead on time, will the president and his machine try other forms of manipulation? The ultra-nationalistic Polish government

has tried to impose postal ballots for its forthcoming vote.

The possibilities for voting rigging are tantalising. Even to consider any of this in the context of the United States is to invite comparisons with Putin's Russia. Except that America's voting system has long been dysfunctional.

The electoral college produces results that distort the popular vote, as in the case of Trump in 2016 and even more insidiously with George W Bush's infamous defeat of Al Gore in 2000 thanks to the 'hanging chads' in Florida and the politically-appointed Supreme Court judges who turned a blind eye to what would have been denounced as vote rigging if it had taken place in other countries. Whenever and however the vote takes place, expect Trump in the interim to fuel further discord in order to galvanise his base. That is all he needs to win, as long as he keeps all of them on board, particularly as he knows that many younger, more radical Democrats won't bother to vote for Joe Biden.

Therefore, Trump needs to feed a sense of alarm, of a country on the brink, in hoc to the enemy. He will be quietly satisfied by what he is seeing with the breakdown of law and order in big cities; he will be even more pleased by the protests against lockdown.

In the next few weeks and months this will be the defining issue – freedom-loving, gun-toting Americans versus the pernicious socialist nanny state. The scenes from a month ago of a small number of men with swastikas, Confederate flags, nooses and assault rifles storming the Michigan state capitol to protest against the extension of restrictions played perfectly into this narrative.

Worse is yet to come. The colossal and sudden rise in unemployment, which has reached heights not seen since the Great Depression of the 1930s, is being blamed by Trump's followers on the overzealous state, telling people they can't earn an honest crust while state governors prevent them from working.

Even when the first wave begins to ebb, chances are perhaps even greater that a second spike will afflict the US more than most, given the propensity to conspiracy theories and miracle cures on that part of the population that is fed on anti-vax rumours.

And what of social divisions? The demographics of death, from Singapore to Spain, suggest migrant and manual labour has been hit hardest by Covid-19. Health inequality around the world has been rising for decades, no more so than in America.

The pandemic has not caused any of the social ills, even if it has sharply accelerated them. The poor and particularly non-whites are the ones doing the essential work, while the wealthier ponder the stresses of Zoom meetings and sneaking off to their second homes.

As Packer writes: "In a smartphone economy that hides whole classes of human beings, we're learning where our food and goods come from, who keeps us alive. An order of organic baby arugula on AmazonFresh is cheap and arrives overnight in part because the people who grow it, sort it, pack it and deliver it have to keep working while sick."

Apart from those living off trusts or inheritances, the under-40s are set to be poorer than their parents. And for their children it is set to be worse still.

That is not confined to one country, but America was the dream for people who



free world

hadn't actually been there. The decline in the appeal of the American model has been precipitous.

To be fair to Trump, most of America's woes long predate him. The health system, such as there is, was always going to be exposed by a pandemic. Coronavirus has overtaken the opioid epidemic as the biggest killer. Barack Obama's attempts to reform healthcare would have provided limited balm.

The school system is sclerotic, usually enhancing division. Infrastructure, particularly that part that is federal and not controlled by individual states, belongs more to a developing country. The two areas of still-unrivalled success – its universities and its tech sector – are beginning to face sterner competition from China and elsewhere.

This is the third calamity to afflict the United States in two decades of the new millennium. When the Twin Towers were destroyed on 9/11, the world rallied. Bush then squandered the goodwill by attacking the wrong enemy in Saddam Hussein. The financial crisis of 2008 nearly brought the world's economies to a standstill. The banking sector was bailed out and saved, but the culprits were never seriously pursued. Once again, the wrong conclusions were drawn, and the wrong people suffered.

One of the great ironies of Covid-19 is that the country where it all started, China, is set to be its main beneficiary. The propaganda points it has scored by sending protective personal equipment and other vital supplies have been unseemly but effective. Few countries are seeking to emulate the Chinese model of development, but that is not its purpose. China's supposed largesse is

not designed to convert, but to secure strategic dependencies from which it will be hard for countries to extricate themselves.

America's self-absorption and societal implosion makes that task blissfully easy. America's demise threatens the entire liberal democratic order.

In my documentary, Anne Applebaum, the American journalist and author ponders the end of her country's democracy. The founding fathers did what they could to insulate it from danger, without and within. "They all read Cicero, they all tried to understand why the Roman Republic had fallen and they tried to write a constitution that would prevent that from happening," she says. "We've forgotten our Roman history, we've forgotten our 19th century history, we've forgotten our early 20th century history – all of which tells us that democracies periodically do get overthrown and periodically do fail. Ours can too."

Can it be stopped? The road to November will provide some of the answers. If Trump loses and leaves the White House gracefully, the slow road to recovery could begin. But it will take years of both courage and conciliation. It is more likely that if he loses, he will not go down without a fight – challenging the results and using the three months of transition to try to undermine the fabric of the system. If he wins, by fair means or foul, spare a thought for Americans, all of them, but particularly those who will suffer most.

■ John Kampfner presents *The Smack of Firm Leadership on Analysis*, BBC Radio 4 on Monday June 8 at 8.30pm and repeated on Sunday June 14 at 9.30pm

The oppression of black people is America's foundation stone

Bonnie Greer



My teen years were full of burning cities, and one burning prison. Attica. We called them "urban uprisings". Before the 1960s, they were called "race riots".

My first produced play, *1919*, was about a so-called race riot in Chicago during what was called the 'Red Summer'.

That year white Americans attacked black Americans in episodic confrontations that left mostly black people injured and dead. The Chicago Police Department had been of no assistance. Helping African Americans was not their job.

The big uprising of the 1960s was in Detroit in what became known as 'the Long Hot Summer' of 1967, one of several across America that year. It was mainly a battle between African American Detroiters and the city's police.

Officers had made a raid on an unlicensed, after-hours joint on July 23. The people revolted. They had had enough of police harassment, and they rocked the city.

Detroit had had urban uprisings before, including one in 1943. This was one of a few that occurred during the industrial build-up that occurred in the Second World War and involved a clash between black and white workers.

Detroit's automotive industry had ramped up to meet the demands of the conflict and became the home of 'Rosie the Riveter', the cultural representative of women who flooded in to factories and shipyards.

Black and white workers from the south also crowded in. They were competing for the same space. The same jobs. The tension exploded the city. And elsewhere.

In Texas, a wartime riot began around the familiar libel that a black man had raped a white woman. Black men fought back.

African Americans attacked white-owned property in Harlem after a black GI had been killed by the NYPD. Again, the black men fought back.

In Los Angeles, the Latinx community – tired of being attacked by white GIs because of the clothing they wore – simply had had enough and they fought back too.

By the time that I was a teenager, burning cities had become part of my DNA, the thing that I knew about growing up black in an urban, American

setting. You knew that the police were not going to help you like any ordinary citizen, and if you considered them to be the enemy, you were not far wrong. They seldom helped, they hurt.

And when I helped make a small film about the Black Patrolmen's Association in Chicago in the early 1970s, I saw the price of being a cop and a black man.

If you were on duty at an uprising, you could be subjected to abuse and worse from both the white cops and the black protestors.

April 5, 1968 – the day after Martin Luther King was assassinated – the black community erupted. This was a howl of pure pain and rage and impotence. A great deal of the community was burned.

Chicago's was one of about 100 uprisings that year which occurred following the murder of Rev. Dr. King. He had been the father of my generation and we had had enough of the racism.

A few weeks later, the Democratic National Convention opened in the city.

My crowd supported senator Gene McCarthy – the Bernie Sanders of the time – and our aim was to change the Democratic Party's mind about him and get him the nomination for president. Those of us who were African American were especially mindful of the notorious Chicago Police Department. We watched our step.

McCarthy was the senator from Minnesota, a place that any Chicagoan would see as benign, rather rural and slow. We knew the expression "Minnesota Nice", that kind of jolly way of being in the world. So it was difficult for me, at first, to believe what has been happening in Minnesota in recent days. Minnesota?

But it's easy to see the pattern; the shape. It's old. It's familiar.

My father raised my brothers, and my brother-in-law has raised my nephew, to understand what it means to be African American and male in the US.

It means, among other things, that the police are not your friends. That there is no 'Officer Friendly' for you, not even if that officer is a fellow African American.

I was told by one male friend that there is that moment when you have "the talk" with your little boy. This consists of telling him how to conduct himself in the presence of police officers. You do not explain yourself. That could be seen, at its mildest, as "talking back".

If you are stopped by a cop and you're in your car, put your hands on the top of the wheel. No searching for your ID, no giving an explanation. Just keep quiet and be still. Very still.

This is your bottom-line education as a man, how you must proceed if you want to stay alive. Not to know this lesson

CHAOS IN THE CAPITAL: Police stand near the White House as demonstrators gather to protest at the killing of George Floyd in Washington, DC

Photo: Getty Images

AGENDA

▶ From page 5

could cost you your life, and maybe worse: the life of your mother.

Because I know a woman who died from grief after her son was shot by the police and paralysed from the neck down. Simply because he “talked back”. He was a “wise guy”.

When a young African American reporter was arrested last week – live on air – while covering the protests in Minnesota, my heart was in my throat. I watched him being taken away as his camera rolled, and I knew that very little could protect him if the police wanted to harm him.

His network got him out and he was back on air. But what happened to him was almost heart-stopping to me.

I did not watch the video of the last moments of George Floyd, the 46-year-old black man whose death has prompted the protests in Minnesota. I did not watch him pleading for air as a police officer knelt on his neck, and then calling for his mother; and then his stillness. I could not watch it. I had seen this played out – metaphorically – too many times.

What writers do is try to enter the mind, the head, of a person they do not know in life. Just to see how they tick; to find some empathy. But I knew that I could not find this with the policeman who knelt on Floyd’s neck, who let him writhe in pain and fear. And I could not watch that moment when a man knows he is going to die.

It is not possible to explain the terror of seeing a cop head your way on the streets of America, because if you fall into their hands, all bets are off. It is over. Whether it actually is or not, the sheer, deep terror remains. And something ends.

Maybe your innocence. Maybe the belief that America is for everyone and that means you, too.

Young people have stated to me that there were no lessons learned from the era of my youth. That nothing happened, that it is all still the same.

Something happened alright. The cops got smarter, their unions got smarter.

They know the patterns of these uprisings; what happens; how they turn out.

They can place a cop in a position of having ‘followed orders’ and move the blame upstairs. They know this from reams and reams of court testimony about police brutality.

All this is to say that the death of George Floyd is an old story and a horrible story. It will not end any time soon. Because this is what America is.

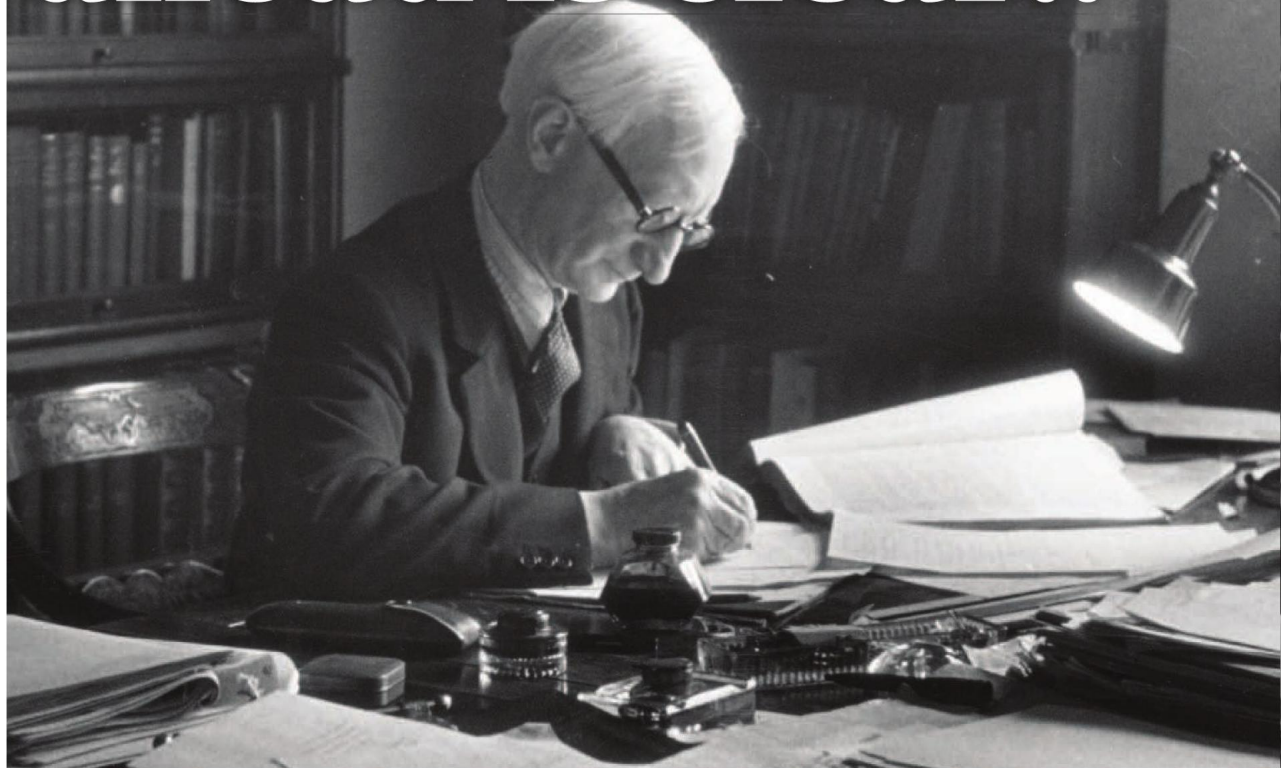
The oppression of people of African descent is its very foundation stone. It’s American as apple pie.

DIVIDED NATION:
Police arrest a protester after demonstrations in Boston

Photo: Getty Images



The task ahead is clear..



Alastair Campbell

Editor-at-Large



At the height of the Johnson/Cummings frenzy, as the entire government was convulsed by a prime minister’s passion to save his adviser, the *Times* ran an article co-authored by Jonathan Powell. It was a Cummings-free zone.

Many among *The New European’s* informed readership will know instantly who Jonathan is – he served as chief of staff to former prime minister Tony Blair for the entire period in office, and played a pivotal role in the Northern Ireland peace process – and many will not. He neither sought a profile, as Cummings does, nor had one given to him whether he liked it or not, as I did, the media’s obsession with me off the scale compared with the pre-Durham Cummings.

Jonathan was happy to stay in the background and, while always supportive of me, relieved to have someone else in the operation to take most of the lightning rod hits from the Tories and the media.

His article in the *Times*, written with Emily Benn, grand-daughter of Tony, who has politics in her veins and a good political brain in her head, was about the big challenges post-Covid.

It was classic Jonathan, in the style of hundreds of notes and emails I have read down the years – take a conventional wisdom, say why it is misplaced, suggest an alternative.

The conventional wisdom – that the pandemic will transform the world for the better.

Why it is misplaced – Spanish flu did not, and it wasn’t the Second World War itself that brought positive change to Britain, but a change of government and a change of approach to how government was done.

The solution now – a new Beveridge Commission, empowered to develop transformational policies with independent experts in the lead in a non-partisan way.

That Britain and the US are now riding high in the global death league tables is not merely down to the fact we both have awful and inadequate human beings as leaders, populists and liars more interested in their own lives than the lives of the people who, sadly, elected them.

It is also because coronavirus has exposed so much that is wrong with Britain after a decade and a half of austerity and Brexit mayhem. Inequalities of race, class and educational attainment; a threadbare and grossly neglected social care system; welfare systems divorced from the realities of the modern economy; millions without savings or security.

The point of the article is that these fundamental challenges cannot be solved by one party or political ideology alone; that it will take far more than one

parliamentary term to implement the change required, which means there will have to be some form of lasting public and political consensus for them, to prevent short-termism and electoral cycles getting in the way.

I would put it less politely. This government has shown itself incapable of meeting any challenge, let alone such an enormous one. Indeed, the penny seems to be dropping with millions that, to put it mildly, Johnson is not very good at the job, and nor are most of his ministers. This is what happens when leaders are chosen on a misplaced sense of ‘personality’ and government is formed not on talent, but on ideology – the ‘Brexit right or wrong, whatever the consequences’ ideology.

The penny might be dropping too, when you see how much better the Germans and other EU nations are doing on Covid, compared with the UK, that perhaps the EU will also be better at Brexit negotiations, and better at adapting to post-Brexit life.

We have seen a really alarming dividing line between the four leaders of the infected world – Trump, Putin, Johnson, Bolsonaro – and those leaders who think fact, reason and expertise have a role to play in political leadership, like Merkel, Macron, Trudeau and Ardern. The coronavirus has exposed the populist virus for what it is – a sickness in our politics that its creators can not and will not cure.

The Powell-Benn proposal is the formation of a group of independent



..but where is the calibre required?

STARK CONTRAST:
William Beveridge
and Dominic
Cummings

Photos: Getty
Images

experts made up of social and business leaders, academics, and political figures from across all parties and none. This is very much how Clement Attlee's post-war government rebuilt Britain.

William Beveridge, the father of the welfare state, was a Liberal. His report was commissioned by a Labour minister, Arthur Greenwood. The National Health Service was first proposed by a Tory minister, Henry Willink, but implemented by Labour, with Nye Bevan in charge as minister.

The whole construct of the welfare state was kept in place for the next 20 years by a cross party consensus, and the near universal support for the principles of the NHS exists to this day, strengthened by their 'lions led by donkeys' heroics in the current crisis.

Of course back then, political and media systems meant the ideas were formed from the top. Today, it is possible to involve the public far more in identifying priorities and formulating ideas and policies to meet them.

Beveridge identified five giants standing in the way of progress: want, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness. What are the five today, in a world so different, and continually being transformed by technological change? That question in itself could spark an important public and political debate.

It is hard to imagine that a prime minister who was prepared to lose the few genuinely talented Tories because they didn't 'believe hard enough in Brexit' will reach out beyond the narrow

Vote Leave tribe for this or anything else. But Labour can, and perhaps Keir Starmer could take a look at the Social Justice Commission set up by former Labour leader John Smith in 1992, whose ideas played an important role in shaping the debate and the policies that led five years later to our first landslide.

It is very easy, in the modern world of 24/7 news and endless blah on social media, to forget that politics is about the big things not the little things.

It is also wise to remember that out of every crisis comes either progress or decline. Right now, with this lot in charge, it is hard to feel confident that it will be progress, especially not with the Brexit catastrophe still to come.

Reading the Powell-Benn article, I was struck not merely by what an obvious and excellent idea it is; but also by the difference in quality between prime ministerial chief advisers then and now. What came through were qualities I saw closely during a decade working with Jonathan – clever, serious, analytical on major policy challenges facing the country, driven by national interest rather than narrow party, political or personal gain.

These are all qualities sadly lacking not just in Cummings, but, more importantly, in Johnson too. It is truly tragic that we have elected as prime minister someone so ill-suited to it, and that he has as his chief adviser someone, as was clear from his ludicrous press conference in the Downing Street garden, so devoid of the qualities needed, or

indeed the basic humanity required, for true public service.

It has been somewhat tiresome, when doing interviews in recent days, to be asked: "Would Tony Blair have sacked you if you had done what Cummings did?" One, I would never have done it. Two, Tony Blair would never have hired at public expense the sort of person who might, and three, he certainly would not have sought to defend such a person in the way Johnson has defended the indefensible in recent days, before going back underground again.

My final observation is prompted by a message from a mid-ranking civil servant who worked with me and Jonathan, and who now works for one of the major departments of state. "The thing about you and Jonathan is that we never saw you talk down to, let alone lose your temper with, someone below your own rank. If you were calling people out, it tended to be cabinet ministers and people at the top of the machine. The reason Cummings and Johnson have so few friends and admirers in here, is that they shout at the little people, and make sure the 'big people' are just yes-men. Keep going," he said. "I know you think they are bad, but believe me, they are worse." We are seeing the consequence of such an ill-advised approach and its consequences for the three essential pillars of any major organisation – leadership, teamship, strategy. Johnson and Cummings have failed on all three in this crisis. This does not fill me with confidence that the current government has the capacity or

intellect to address the problems outlined by Jonathan and Emily in their article.

As it required thinking that went beyond a three word slogan, a few words of Latin or an after-dinner speech, we can be sure that Johnson, who at the Liaison Committee was shown as not understanding basic welfare concepts such as 'no recourse to public funds', will not have read.

The very last point comes courtesy of a friend who serves in the Special Forces. You may have seen last week that, a bit manic, I posted online an ill-advised video impersonating Boris Johnson singing a new national anthem, *God Save My Darling Dom*, to the Queen.

I wore my brother Donald's Guards tie and his military medals, which unsurprisingly offended some, while amusing others. I later deleted it and apologised, but not before getting into a very ugly Twitter spat with defence minister Johnny Mercer.

"Keep going with that plonker," my SAS friend, who has fought in Iraq, Afghanistan and plenty more places besides, urged me. "They have absolutely no idea what it feels like to be sent to risk your life, when your country has chosen to make itself so irrelevant and derided in the world."

All over the world, many employed by the government, not least diplomats, are feeling that. I suspect we are going to have to be rid of them before the Powell-Benn proposal has any chance of flying. Meanwhile, the damage mounts, and the country suffers.

AGENDA

On the crest of a knave



MICHAEL WHITE ON THE WEEK LOCKDOWN STARTED TO LIFT AND REVEALED DANGER TO COME

Just as the Minneapolis riots over the death of handcuffed George Floyd were starting to spread to other American cities one of our own newspapers reported relieved surprise among the experts that our own Covid-19 inspired lockdown had not generated civil disorder and looting here too. "Let's not tempt fate," I muttered. The easing of official restrictions, combined with rising unemployment and unseasonal weather, may make the next few weeks more turbulent than those just past. Especially so if a second pandemic wave – the Cummings Wave – prompts renewed efforts to thwart the pent-up partying instincts of the young, whose prospects have been disproportionately damaged by the pandemic.

Media around the world has a very human habit of looking at other countries' misfortunes and reassuring their audiences that "it doesn't happen here", despite everyone knowing that *gilets jaunes* and riot police pop up everywhere. Even the clerical kleptocracy of Iran and the market-Stalinists who hold sway over China joined the tut-tutting over the latest outburst of urban mayhem in the US. It took our own media five days to remember that we too have police brutality and opportunity looting. The Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989 was far bloodier than has ever been admitted. Instead it's disappeared from Chinese websites.

The latest US riots have been judged by many Americans the worst since Martin Luther King was assassinated in 1968, certainly worse than any British disturbances in recent times, including the recession riots of 1981. The poll tax riots (1990) looked pretty serious on US TV – I watched them from there – but, except for Mrs Thatcher (she lost her job), were much less serious than the "Tottenham riots" of August 2011. Lasting six nights, after the police shooting of Mark Duggan, they spread across the capital – to quiet Ealing even – and other major cities. Five people died and 3,000 were arrested. Nearly 50,000 businesses were damaged at a cost of £200 million.

The then-mayor of London, one Boris Johnson, was a bit late in getting home from a family holiday in the Canadian Rockies. Gallantry, not idleness, we were assured last week; apparently the Winnebago he had rented was too big for his wife to drive. No such excuse justified the mayor's subsequent purchase of three just-in-case German water cannon which were banned by the home secretary (a Mrs May), later sold at a loss of £300,000. Typical Johnsonian extravagance, flamboyant and useless, critics noted.

In hard times we should try to look on the bright side. In 2020, Nissan's global retrenchment will close its factory in Spain, but the carmaker has just said it will keep open its highly-efficient plant in

Sunderland – provided there's an EU deal. Excellent, because the north east has been badly hit by the impact of Covid-19 on pre-existing poverty and ill-health. By the same token, we can take comfort from remembering that the 2011 riots were followed the following summer by a successful London Olympics for which mayor Johnson is still claiming more credit than he deserves. At least he hasn't boasted than Nissan's decision is a tribute to Brexit.



It is easy to imagine how Britain might experience civil unrest this summer. The core ingredients of poverty, anger and social division, are visible. Smouldering grievances, reinforced by a tendency in parts of the media to discount the excesses which predictably latch on to peaceful protest, can be ignited by a spark. The 'liberal cringe' one detects in some BBC interviewers enrages the other side of the cultural divide. It gives the likes of Donald Trump – who'd have guessed? – the opportunity to polarise and provoke. "Domestic terrorism" talk is easy, but deployment of federal troops on American streets may not be so easily reversed. Ask Belfast. But most people prefer security over liberty – and justice – even when burning streets are not their own. Nixon won in '68.

Which way would Boris' instincts lead him if a storm broke? Would he buy back those water cannon knowing that Priti 'Quarantine' Patel wouldn't ban their use this time? And that law-and-order supporters would cheer? Or would his aversion to conflict seek to appease his opponents? Many of them would likely be angry 'red wall' voters whose furloughs have been followed by a P45, perhaps by renewed lockdown as coronavirus laxity produces the renewed surge. History tells us a second wave would be bad for battered morale and a fragile economy.

The old Boris did not hesitate to deploy the weapons of culture war against the "liberal metropolitan elite" over Brexit, against the "nanny state" for interfering with his God-given right to be 5ft 9in tall and weigh 17st 7lb. Dominic Cummings – still in post as I type – is known to be an admirer of the cynical Bismarck, who deployed *Kulturkampf* against the Catholic church and liberals to help consolidate his new Second Reich after 1870. He also wooed red wall workers by creating the world's first welfare state. The fact that it all ended in death and destruction might not trouble Dom: it worked in theory at the time.

The *Mail* reported mid-week that – solely on his own initiative – Dom briefed the "14 days quarantine for arrivals" plan to the *Times* on March 8 because he needed a 'dead cat' distraction from a *Guardian* analysis of the growing care

“**The free-spending, good-time populist in Johnson, the Boris of buses, garden bridges and zip wires to nowhere, would surely relish a financial splurge justified by the scale of the economic challenge ahead. He could leave someone else to clean it up**

home crisis. The boy genius thought it would be popular. That went well, Dom. Worth a sacking?

There are positive opportunities here for Johnson if he has the energy and wisdom to take them. The past three months have pitted high profile epidemiological science and other disciplines like behavioural theory against each other and the practical constraints of politics, whose blame-averse leaders claim to be "following the science" when it's more like a negotiation. Economics has had to take a back seat and quietly write cheques for rookie chancellor Sunak to sign.

But now that the CV-19 infection rate is dropping the ever-emollient Sunak is restored to the front passenger seat where he can control Boris's Winnebago satnav. As plenty of dismayed experts have made plain, this week's gradual re-opening of classrooms, IKEA and sporting fixtures – not to mention jam-packed Durdle Door beach – is not dictated by science. Its confidence is still troubled by a persistently high R number and the fragility of testing and tracing, despite "world-beating" claims. Ministers stand accused of exaggerating test rates. Chris Witty reportedly resisted Boris' pressure to cut the alert level from four to three.

Such desperation is driven by Treasury alarm and political pressure from libertarians who haven't yet been on a ventilator. Hence Sunak's decision to require employers to contribute 5% to the £8 billion cost of furlough pay from the autumn. It prompted immediate predictions that it will bankrupt thousands of companies and may push two million people – mostly in low-paid or insecure jobs – out of their 'hidden unemployment'. This economy is changed forever.

Patel's (Dom's?) half-baked quarantine plans – is it still 14 days self isolation for all arrivals except from Ireland? – further enrage business. The tourism, hospitality

and arts sectors are in despair. Churches are offended that they're still closed. Tabloids are demanding one metre social distancing. Expert opinion disagrees. At Durdle Door a swathe of public opinion has settled for two centimetres and suicidal leaps off its 200ft cliff – the 'Dom Dive', as it may become known.

The free-spending, good-time populist in Johnson, the Boris of buses, garden bridges and zip wires to nowhere, would surely relish a financial splurge justified by the scale of the economic challenge ahead. He could leave someone else to clean it up, probably over decades. A surprising number of reputable economists argue that £100bn of extra borrowing – the pandemic costs so far – can safely be packaged up in long-term, low interest bonds like war debt. Up to a point, Lord Copper.

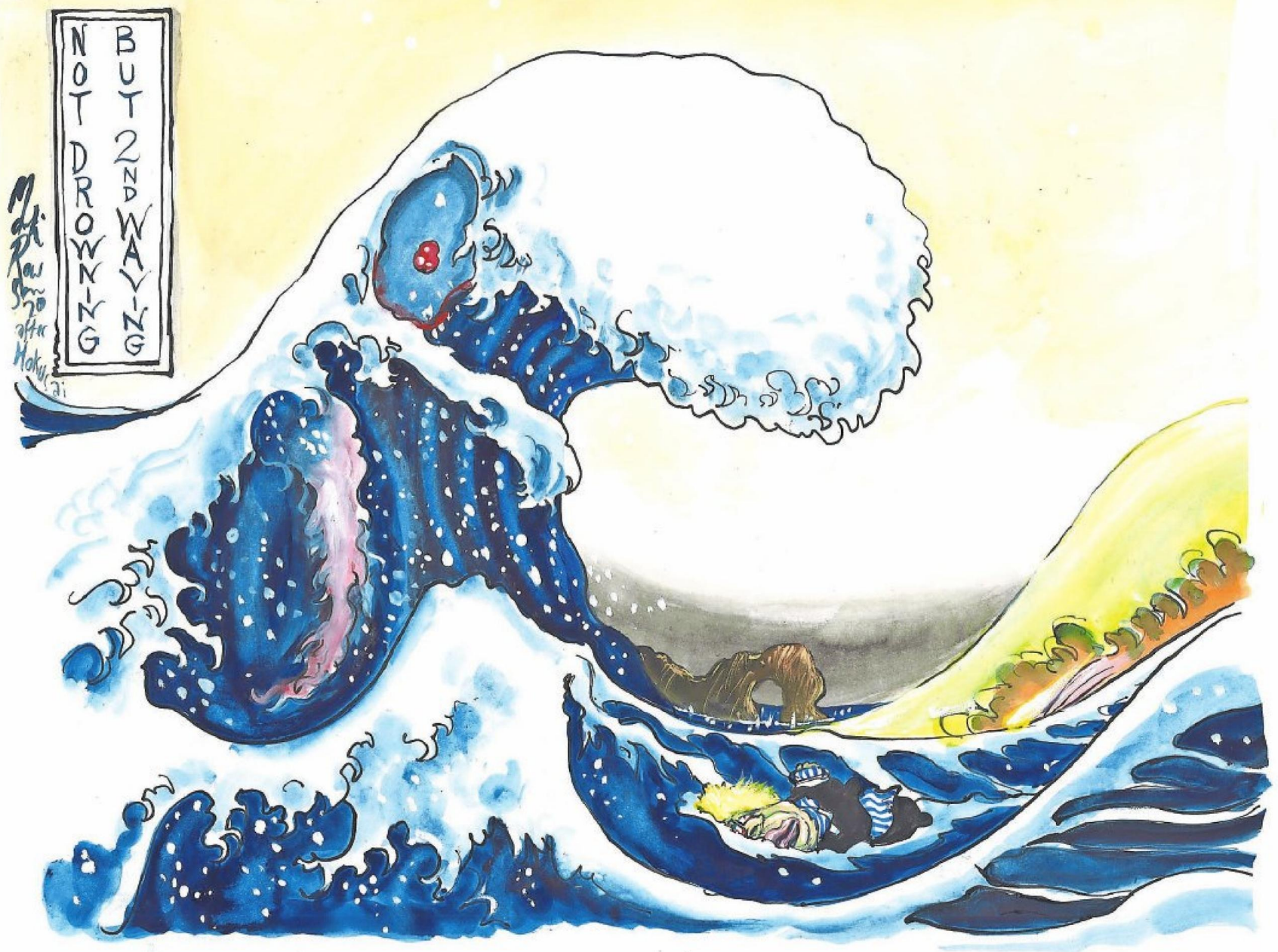
It's hard now to recall that Before Covid (BC) Johnson's post-austerity cabinet was committed to "levelling up" those left-behind regions with better infrastructure, new skills and new industries, as if it had never been tried – repeatedly – for years. The challenges remain, but more urgently. How do ministers do more to boost the latest "lost generation" to emerge from school or university with suddenly-worse prospects? How much should the old, those who can afford it, pay in reduced services and higher taxes to help fund recovery? Should ministers protect 'old' jobs or steer workers towards new industries – whatever they turn out to be?



In the light of greater success in tackling Covid achieved by devolved governments in places like Germany, should the UK regions and metro-city mayors get the power and money to take the lead? Or was Germany's success attributable to speed, competence and public trust, much as it was in centralised Taiwan and South Korea?

To my surprise this week I even clocked a rare endorsement from the veteran free market think-tank, the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) for that favoured left-wing concept of a universal basic income (UBI), one recently dusted off by Compass, an anti-Blairite think tank. It's essentially what furlough is providing, less complex and unfair than Iain Duncan Smith's universal credit. No more intrusive, expensive and dehumanising means-testing, eh? Instead the state guarantees an income floor, not a ceiling.

No, I don't expect UBI to happen. Core problems of cost and disincentive to work can't easily be solved. But it reminds us that a crisis – most obviously war – can make the once unthinkable happen – and quickly. Remember how the First World War emancipated women. It may be the



same for the way we organise car-dominated cities that pollute the planet, how we commute to work after a WFH experience shared by billions, how we produce food...

Analysts as weighty as the renowned polymath Jared Diamond and Henry Kissinger wonder how many of our institutions will survive a crisis which some have obviously failed. An "extinction event" for institutions, as someone else put it? Or can they learn from Covid to cooperate better on even bigger threats: climate change, dwindling planetary resources – notably soil and water – destabilising inequality.



Even to frame the question is to highlight Team Johnson's obvious inadequacy. This week seven ex-foreign secretaries wrote to Dominic Raab urging a more robust and coordinated response to China's threat to the Sino-British agreement on the future of Hong Kong. Ex-PMs Major, Blair and Brown have joined calls for the absent G20 to take a lead role in fighting Covid-19 and beyond. When Angela Merkel decided against attending the US-led session of the G7 on pandemic grounds, Dettol Don cancelled

the already-postponed event and casually suggested inviting Russia, Mexico and India next time. He removed the US from WHO.

Yes, international steps have been taken over Hong Kong and Covid coordination. They just feel ritualistic, reflexes of a fading order whose unofficial convenor since 1945 – the president of the United States – has gone rogue, a Tweeter-in-Chief no longer taken seriously by the grown-ups. Threatening loss of legal protection for Twitter and other social media platforms which challenge (but do not censor) his diatribes may actually be the right way to go. But Trump's action was pique, not policy.

Is Boris much better? Stop winging it," says Keir Starmer. The Cummings affair exposed the PM's craven dependency on his over-mighty adviser. The voters have registered their disapproval of the Domni-shambles with pollsters as unfinished business. Some pitiful, loyalist columns urge us all to move on when the choice isn't binary: we can do both, just as we can chide Emily Maitlis on the BBC's *Newsnight* while noting that it may be another of Dom's 'dead cat' diversions.

This week "friends of Dom" revealed that their man will be gone in six months,

once Brexit is finally done and dusted on New Year's Eve without a further extension – perhaps without a trade deal either. The Covid rubble will bury the Brexit corpse, goes the theory. We've heard versions of this before. Remember how the UK would hold all the negotiating cards?

The implication adds to Johnson's humiliation. The Cummings who despises everyone else despises Boris too. Watching him bend with the breeze on the NHS, on Huawei's 5G contract and much else, Dom fears that the PM will waver on that Brexit extension if he is not there. He's right. Alas, this insight emboldens other heresies to surface in the Tory press, even briefly. When Johnson loyalist, Danny Kruger MP, protested that attacks on Dom amount to a vote of no confidence in Boris, Tory pundit Alex Massie said: "Precisely."

Writing for the *Spectator*, Johnson's former fiefdom, the Scottish columnist declared that, even allowing for a slow recovery from Covid-19, it is obvious that Boris "is not up to the job". His scratchy performance before the Commons liaison committee confirmed that he is "painfully out of his depth." No PM should be so wholly dependent on one adviser. "If Boris Johnson cannot

function without Cummings, he is not qualified to be PM," wrote Massie.

Such a verdict will hardly shock *TNE* readers. But this appeared in the *Spectator*. Almost as remarkable to me was the failure of Dominic Lawson, another ex-*Spectator* editor, to write a word about the Domni-shambles in any of the four columns penned since it broke. It suggests he will not perjure himself for Boris. Remember the Tory party's secret weapon is not loyalty, as sentimentally asserted in my youth. It is disloyalty: if they fail, throw them overboard. That's what feeble Boris should have done to Dom, but didn't.

The 'Call my Bluff' negotiations with Brussels continue this week. Some Brexit champions have persuaded themselves that in seeking to curb the ECB's bond buying programme, Germany's constitutional court has done the judicial equivalent of Brexit by defying the European Court of Justice. The German judges are said to be rowing back as Brussels, Paris and Berlin plot counter-moves. What is striking is the Lawson-esque silence that has descended on what is potentially another extinction event, one that could harm us all. As they used to say in the movies, "I don't like it, Carruthers, it's too damn quiet out there".

AGENDA

We are being played for fools

In an eviscerating essay, LIZ GERARD says the UK is being misgoverned, misled and manipulated, with doublespeak and double standards

They are playing us for fools.

They said we were prepared for the coronavirus. That we had “fantastic, world-beating” testing; that the NHS was fully equipped and ready. Then the bug arrived. And it turned out that we’d sold all the fantastic equipment abroad or run it down in austerity.

They told us not to worry. We must wash our hands while singing *Happy Birthday*, but apart from that, it should be “business as usual”. Shaking hands – even with people in hospitals treating virus patients – was just fine.

But, just in case, they appealed for ventilators (having ‘missed the email’ about joining a European procurement programme. Maybe, post-Brexit, anything from the EU goes to spam).

Ventilator manufacturers and suppliers put up their hands, but they didn’t return the calls. Maybe a ‘patriotic’ vacuum cleaner tycoon with a Singapore HQ could help?

The World Health Organisation urged every country to “test, test, test”. So at that very moment, we stopped. Because “the science” said so. Except it didn’t; we simply didn’t have the capacity to carry out the tests. Because they had ignored offers from university research labs and instead relied on friends in private industry.

It didn’t matter, though, because there was a “game-changer” antibody test round the corner that would check whether healthy people had ever been ill. That, they said, would be far more effective in this “battle/war” against our invisible “invader/enemy/foe” than a system to check whether ill people had Covid and, if so, who else they might have infected. They were still making the same promises two months later.

They toyed with the idea that it would be a good thing if more than half the country became ill because that might stop them becoming ill later. Then denied ever thinking such a thing.

People started dying. But they had “underlying health conditions” or were very elderly and probably would have died soon anyway. Most people would get only “very mild” symptoms.

While China, South Korea and New Zealand limited movement – and their death tolls – the British way was to keep

calm and carry on. Perhaps they thought we valued “liberty” and “freedom” over life. The liberty to watch football in Liverpool in the company of fans from Covid-riven Spain; the freedom to travel across the country to watch horses jump fences in Cheltenham.

People started dying in larger numbers. Including younger, healthier people. So they told us to make only essential journeys and not to visit – or even isolate – in our holiday homes (an instruction guaranteed to irritate millions of families that don’t have a second bedroom, let alone a second home).

So we went to the seaside instead. And created essential traffic jams all the way to Cornwall, the Lakes and the Peak District. Tougher measures had to follow. Schools were to close.

Pubs could stay open until midnight, but customers were urged, pleeeeeease, to forgo the “Englishman’s inalienable right” to enter them one last time. Funnily enough, the advice was again disregarded.

Finally, they told us all to stay indoors, full stop. The Queen was enlisted to tell us we were all in it together and – in keeping with the favoured wartime motif – to echo Vera Lynn’s promise that we would meet again. A week later, a cabinet minister was caught jaunting to his second home. Was he sacked? Did he resign? No. He was wheeled out to speak for the government at the Downing Street briefing that very day.

There were mumblings about a lack of hospital equipment, and Michael Gove promised on national television that “thousands” of ventilators would start arriving the following week. A few duly appeared. Have the rest ever surfaced? Who knows?

Soldiers built pop-up hospitals in exhibition centres, stadiums, airports. Anything Wuhan can do, we can do too. Except protect lives. But there were no extra nurses or doctors to work in the new hospitals, so they couldn’t take many patients and were mothballed.

And still people died. But the only ones they were counting were those who had gone to hospital and had been tested – while alive – to see if they really had the virus. And they still weren’t doing that



THE REAL ISSUES, NOT THE FROTH: Doctors hold a silent protest outside Downing Street to show thanks for NHS workers and other frontline medical staff as they battle coronavirus

Photo: Getty Images

many tests. So the numbers weren’t too frightening.

Anyway, everyone was too busy praying for the prime minister, who was in intensive care “fighting for his life”. Even when the death toll hit 1,000 deaths a day, they found reasons to rejoice: Boris was safely back at Chequers with Carrie and an old man called Captain Tom had raised a million pounds for the NHS by walking round his garden, the last lap witnessed and saluted by a military guard of honour.

Doctors and nurses begged to be tested because they couldn’t work if they had a sniffle, even if it wasn’t the dreaded Covid. Who was to know? They promised that testing would be “ramped up”. It

wasn’t. But they clapped for carers on Thursdays.

Doctors and nurses begged for protective equipment so that they could do their jobs safely. They said they’d bought billions of “items” (a single glove counting as an “item”). There was plenty to go round – “if used properly”. And they clapped on Thursdays.

Doctors and nurses died. They paused for a minute’s silence, then carried on telling us how wonderful the country and its heroes were. Especially Captain Tom, whose reward for a walk that had by now raised £30 million, was to ‘virtually’ open one of the ghost Nightingale hospitals.

They promised again and again that testing would be ramped up to 100,000 day

AGENDA



by the end of April. This time they “smashed” the target – by sending 40,000 in the post (who knows if they arrived, were conducted properly or ever processed) and thousands more to university labs for research purposes.

Hidden away from all of this, old people were dying by the dozen in care homes all over the country. But they weren’t counted. Was that because they didn’t count? Hadn’t that genius pulling the strings of government expressed the sentiment that if a few old people died, so be it? There was, however, one old person to be venerated above all others. Captain Tom, now the proud owner of an England Test cricket cap, was promoted to colonel for his 100th birthday.

Carers pleaded for protective equipment, but there was none to be had, because the rest of the world had gone to market in January while they were worrying about bongs for Brexit, and the limited supplies were needed for the NHS heroes. Never let it be said that they weren’t imaginative in seeking to make up the shortfall: they bought some gowns from a Turkish T-shirt salesman – but they weren’t up to standard. So the *Daily Mail* helped out by flying in a few bits and pieces amid great fanfare.

At last they started counting everyone whose death certificate included the word Covid. But even then, there were 10,000 more deaths this spring than last that they couldn’t explain.

But no one should think that they didn’t care about the aged dying. They’d issued a blanket order for over-70s to stay indoors and see no one for 12 weeks. They’d thrown a “protective ring” around care homes “from the outset”. By block-booking 160,000 places to free up hospital beds? Great idea, if only they’d tested the patients before discharging them. Yes, they “isolated” residents, but the staff caring for them had to go back and forth in the community like anyone else who had to get to work.

Never mind. We were soon rejoicing again because Carrie had had a baby. Yet the natives were still restless, stuck indoors, home-schooling their kids and Zooming. So they let us visit garden

centres. The Queen was rolled out again for VE Day. And they knighted Captain Tom. He ended up raising £39m, against an original target of £1,000. Amazing. Would he have been honoured for the £1,000? The actual walking would have taken no less effort, his personal achievement no smaller. Of course not.

The difference was a PR-savvy daughter and a government/country desperate for something joyous.

We needed it. We now have the highest death toll in bald numbers in Europe and, last week, the highest daily toll per capita in the world. But, having spent seven weeks proclaiming our “success” in combating the virus, they suddenly declared international comparisons “unhelpful” once we’d claimed the European championship.

The scientist whose research prompted the lockdown was caught having a visit from his lover in breach of the rules. They got rid of him pronto.

The man who effectively runs the country – and probably wrote the rules – was caught driving his sick wife and their son 260 miles to his parents’ country farm because he thought he was about to get Covid. They clung to him like ivy to a willow tree. For he was all they had. Without him, they’d be even more clueless.

These were, they said, exceptional circumstances. Because who would care for the boy if both parents were ill? As though no one else had faced such a dilemma. He was, they said, right to follow his instincts as a father. As though no one had set aside their paternal instincts in order to obey the rules as most of us understood them.

It was reasonable, they said, for their man to drive to a beauty spot to test his vision when his eyes were “wonky”. On Easter Sunday, his wife’s birthday, or “Day 15”, as he pointedly called it, knowing infected households are supposed to isolate for 14 days.

So reasonable that Michael Gove asserted on LBC that he, too, “on occasion” had driven to check his eyesight.

So reasonable that cabinet ministers dutifully and desperately tweeted in unison that we should “move on” – unaware or untroubled that their jarring covid tone offended the nation’s Covid ear.

People are dying. The economy is wrecked. We’re heading for a no-deal Brexit precipice. And still they use words like “fantastic” and “world-beating”. This isn’t a competition; we don’t want to beat the world. We just want our families kept safe and to be able to hold our mum’s hand as she dies. Instead we’re living in an Orwellian dystopia ‘led’ by an absentee prime minister of Churchillian delusion who signed up for the glory, not the gory. A man devoid of integrity, insight and ideas; a man totally lacking the appetite, application or ability to perform the job attached to the title he craved.

A world where three-word slogans masquerade as policy. A world where clapping on Thursdays and seeing the NHS as a charity case have become a substitute for paying and equipping health staff properly. A world where they fly the Union Flag, publish photos of babies, dogs and princesses, and get the Queen to talk to the nation from time to time. In the hope that we won’t notice the rest.

They are playing us for fools.

AGENDA

Johnson is about to plunge us into the Brexit trap



JAMES BALL'S DECONSTRUCTED



Remember Brexit? It happened roughly a century and a half ago, on January 31 of this year. The UK left the EU and is no longer a member state. A bitterly divisive referendum campaign, several years of fractious argument, two elections, and an eventual thumping Conservative majority all eventually worked to one end: Brexit got done.

There are plenty of reasons that we might not immediately have felt either the best promised effects of Brexit, or the worst consequences we warned of in this newspaper.

At the time of our departure, the most obvious reason was the implementation period agreed as part of the Article 50 deal – everything would carry on as before until the end of this year, to give time to agree a future trading relationship. That's meant no backstop, no queues at the border, no Brexit-induced economic disruption, nothing.

Even that implementation period, though, has been somewhat overshadowed by the fact of a global pandemic – a disruption absolutely no-one involved in Brexit factored into their calculations.

Now, a year that was supposed to be dominated by UK/EU trade talks is instead a series of pitched battles between each country and a novel

disease. The UK is faring particularly badly, with an estimated 62,000 excess deaths since the crisis began and the nation still under heavy lockdown restrictions.

We now know that regardless of whether Boris Johnson negotiates the Brexit deal of his wildest imagination or we crash out with no deal, the UK – like most of the world – will be in a recession so heavy that the 2010 crash will look like a blip, and that we will be dealing with the economic aftermath of Covid-19 for the rest of this decade, and likely for longer.

Everything about this urges caution: every organisation in the UK is strained to capacity. Budgets are stretched, businesses are on the brink, management time and energy is focused on the crisis, government energy even more so – we do not need to load ourselves with another burden. We are dealing with enough.

To anyone agreeing with that, there is of course a simple route: we can, until June 30 this year, extend the current 'implementation period' and hold the Brexit status quo for either one or two further years.

This does not and can not frustrate or cancel Brexit. The UK has already left the EU. To rejoin, it would have to apply as a new member state. This remains true whether we attempted to do so now, next year, or in five years, whether we extend or not.

It is a delusion – a paranoid or a wildly optimistic one, depending on your perspective – to think delay means anything other than delay. Without a time machine, we cannot stop what has already happened.

Unfortunately, among those with the paranoid delusions about what an extension means are the current residents of Number 10 – who not only remain dead set on refusing an extension, but who also seem to think anyone suggesting otherwise is an enemy of the 52%.

Where the rest of us see a needless extra burden on UK businesses and the UK government – not to mention on member states who have better things to do than negotiate or prepare for no-deal right now – Number 10 sees an opportunity.

Some advisors believe coronavirus offers an opportunity: get the 'clean break' done amid the crisis and any disruption and economic damage will just be lost in the noise and chaos of coronavirus. As wisdom goes, it's up there with



suggesting we might as well feed someone we love arsenic after a heart attack, as they're ill already and we've got the poison on-hand.

Not only do we risk killing them off for absolutely no benefit, we're still likely to get caught: if the UK economy suffers more than others across the world thanks to a combination of Brexit and coronavirus, this will show up in GDP figures, whether the government likes it or not.

And if advisors think necessary queues for supermarkets – and debatably-necessary shortages on shelves – will have added to the public's patience for self-inflicted queues and shortages, they have misread the British public nearly as badly as when they thought suggesting going to Barnard Castle for an eye test was a brilliant communications strategy.

Number 10's logic is based on the idea that the UK and EU are not really that far apart on a deal – some in the PM's team believe that the level playing field is the only real sticking point, and the rest can be quite easily hammered out.

The EU stands ready to disabuse them of that notion, again, with substantive disagreements in as many as 10 major policy areas including, inevitably, fishing.

Patience on the EU side is dimming: the EU cannot force an extension if the UK doesn't ask for one, parliament doesn't have the numbers to overrule Johnson, and once June 30 has passed the UK leaves its interim arrangements on January 1 whether there's anything to replace them or not.

If progress in the talks isn't a real prospect, then why not write them off and just concentrate on preparing EU states for the disruption the exit will cause? If Number 10 is hoping this is the moment German car manufacturers will finally ride to the rescue, they will yet again be disappointed.

The result will be UK businesses having to prepare for a whole new shock and crisis in the middle of a huge existing crisis – able to do nothing to avert either. That will be tough for UK-based businesses, but risks making decisions all too easy for international businesses.

Coronavirus, and the recession it will cause, means many global or European businesses will be looking at which outlets to close, which factories to shutter, which workers to lay off, around the planet. Just as they are doing so, the UK is going to impose substantial transaction costs to manage a no-deal end to the implementation period – and the

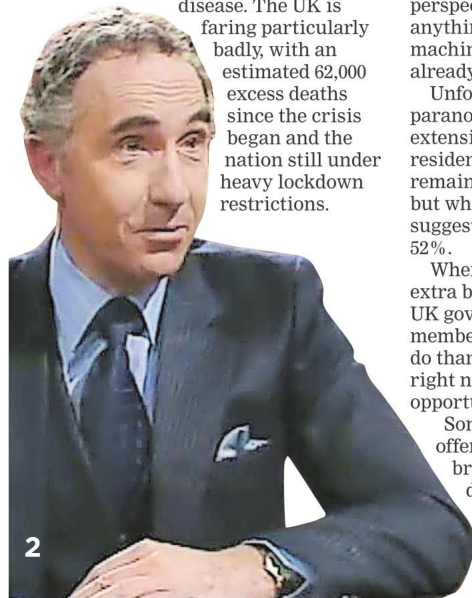
SILLY THING, SILLY WAY:

1 Prime minister Boris Johnson is set on refusing to seek an extension to the UK's Brexit deal – despite the impact of Covid-19

Photo: Getty Images

2 Nigel Hawthorne as Sir Humphrey Appleby in *Yes Minister*

Photo: Contributed





PRAGMATIC:
French president
Emmanuel
Macron wears a
protective face
mask during a
visit to a factory
in Etaples

Photo: Getty
Images

Why the PM can't 'Get Covid Done'

Boris Johnson's biggest error on coronavirus has been to treat it as a challenge like Brexit, says
MARION VAN RENTERGHEM



Let's start with a story... Once upon a time, a new God made a sudden apparition in 10 Downing Street and the people named Him Brexit. Those who worship Him hear what they wish to hear, and what they first heard was that He promised they would go to paradise only on the condition that they left the European Union. "Get Brexit done" was the word the Apostles believed. Hence the Apostles repeated after Him: "Get Brexit done! Get Brexit done!" and it was a great, great success. A landslide. God rewarded the most enthusiastic of His Apostles, Boris, by entitling him "Prime Apostle".

Then came a plague from China. An unknown virus. The Prime Apostle climbed back up the mountains to take His Commandment from God Brexit, and as far as he can remember, he reckons he heard Him say: "Get Brexit done again." Therefore Boris the Apostle did the same as he did before. To tackle the virus, he obeyed the dogmas of Brexit. Why convert? Good old dogmas had turned out to be so successful.

The moral of the story is that Brexit dogmas stained Boris Johnson's approach to the coronavirus: the same tactics were used, the same clichés, the same sermons on national pride and British exceptionalism; comparisons with the Second World War; a sense of island greatness that would protect the country; an illusion of a heroic and invincible Great Britain which would resist the virus as it did with the Nazis – as opposed to France or Italy, those poor southern buggers.

We saw the same optimistic energy, the same foggy incantations, the same bluster and amateurism, the same denial of reality. Boris Johnson boasted of shaking hands with people in hospitals treating infected patients, he skipped Cobra meetings and evaded difficult questions; then he claimed an "apparent success" as his country clocked up the worst death rate in Europe.

For what reasons? Why did he behave that way? The only valuable explanation is political: ideology – the political version of religion. By nature, Johnson is pragmatically self-centred and not characteristically ideological.

But he has kept in his soul the memory of those magic dogmas which led him to victory before. He has become a Brexit addict.

In the name of God Brexit, Johnson needed to deliver on his promise of a strong, global Britain. The pandemic



UNLIKELY PRAGMATIST: France's president Macron

Photo: Getty Images

threatened all that, so he dithered, rather than tackle it. While other countries locked down, Britain delayed.

In the name of God Brexit, Johnson needed the UK to "take back control" from Europe and prove to the world that it could face the pandemic alone. So, Britain missed out on an EU ventilator scheme and stayed aloof of another for PPE, opting instead to source items from Turkey, which failed to meet safety standards.

In the name of God Brexit, the prime minister needed to keep by his side Dominic Cummings, the architect of those dogmas, prayers and slogans that had delivered Brexit. Were he to go, there would be a big hole in the project. For Johnson, Cummings is Brexit. A human clone of his God. Therefore the Prime Apostle protected his adviser beyond reason, even though he had shattered their successful sermons on the "Will of the people" against the "Elite", by breaking the rules of the lockdown.

And, last but not least, in the name of God Brexit, Johnson may let the negotiations with Brussels end in no deal. It will be at the risk of losing everything, but so what? Ideology and dogmas will stay safe and healthy.

By weird coincidence, the celebrated date of January 31, 2020, was not only the official consecration of the divorce between the UK and the EU. It was also the date that the first coronavirus cases were confirmed on British soil.

Johnson seems hardly have paid attention to this, so focused was he on his own glory and the victory of his masterpiece, that thing he had promised to the people as his own access to power: Brexit. He had other things to worry about too. He needed to invest massively in infrastructure and the NHS (following years of austerity introduced by his own party), and to satisfy the demands of the corporate interests who had supported him and the Labour voters who had voted for him. He needed to deliver both deregulation and public spending.

Founded on contradictory, unsustainable promises and on a hell of a nerve, his program reflected the very special Tory he is: economically right and

left, socially libertarian, politically nationalist, and populist in his strategy of conquest.

Up to now, he had the golden touch. But then came the party pooper: coronavirus. Pinning down the British economy, it has also pinned down a part of his Brexit plans, which involved high public indebtedness.

As a populist, Johnson is also a gambling addict. He loves nothing more than taking bigger risks to try and win. Double or nothing, he will always try one more card, throw one more dice. After he first gambled on no lockdown, he was forced to a U-turn by alarming forecasts about the cost in human lives and on the NHS' inability to cope.

The UK now holds not only the worst Covid death toll in Europe, but also the most pessimistic recession forecast (a drop of 14% of the national wealth, according to the governor of the Bank of England).

Late to lock down, the gambling prime minister is now easing the measures, hoping an economic miracle will erase the memory of the death toll.

His charm, his brio, his resurrection after being seriously ill, meant he retained much popularity. But his fatal mistakes are now visible.

Even the *Spectator*, the magazine he once edited and which often likes to portray my country as a place of leftists permanently on strike, has praised France as an example. This gives a hint to the extent of the shambles Johnson's government has reached.

In France, we used to envy Anglo-Saxon pragmatism in politics. We tend to prioritise intellectual theories over actually dealing with situations, and big principles inherited from our Revolution over economic efficiency.

Out of shameful jealousy, we tend to display a condescending attitude towards the British, who used to care less than us about social welfare, but excel in taking the reality into account before building theories.

Faced with the coronavirus crisis, it strangely turned out to the opposite. Macron's France became pragmatic and Johnson's Britain, blindly ideological.

prospect of lower long-term profits thanks to Brexit.

By forcing through Brexit at this idiotic place, Johnson and Dominic Cummings are about to make the UK the most attractive target in the world for businesses – businesses looking to cut jobs and close factories.

Before *The Thick Of It* served as our fictional guide to UK politics, there was *Yes Minister* – which saw hapless minister Jim Hacker face off against civil service supremo Sir Humphrey Appleby.

The latter would regularly spar with and outwit the former, frustrating his plans with constant smarm – but just once, came a rare moment of sincerity as Hacker was determined to go forwards with a distinctly ill-advised idea: "If you're going to do this damned silly thing," he concluded regretfully, "don't do it in this damned silly way."

Urged on by the advisors around him, deaf to the protests of businesses and civil servants alike, Johnson is set to do the damn silly thing in the silliest way imaginable – dousing the country in petrol while the world is on fire.

■ See page 17 for Leonie Cooper on the political case for a Brexit pause, and pages 18 & 19 for Francis Beckett on the Trump trade deal Britain is being fattened for.

LETTERS: Have your say, email letters@theneweuropean.co.uk

Safety has been sacrificed by the Cummings saga

Due to the lack of agreement about Dominic Cummings' actions, a large proportion of the population aren't that concerned about lockdown and social distancing. The beaches are packed and social distancing is all but gone.

A leader needs to be firm not for the sake of loyalty but for the safety of the people. It's not about who's right, it's about what the right thing to do to ensure we continue to be safe. His loyalty should lie with the British people and Dominic Cummings should apologise so we can all move on.

Tony Howarth
SW3

So, our new not-quite-yet world-beating NHS Test and Trace system is, uh, on the way to being up-and-running and it might take a few weeks to get it fully in place. Of course, it was heralded, much-trumpeted and hugely over-egged to drag attention away from the Cummings saga, followed for the same reason by idiotic advance notice of some easing of the lockdown just before a really sunny weekend. Brilliant.

It hasn't stopped the millions of emails being sent to MPs demanding DC's resignation. (I sent mine twice, to match how Matt Hancock counts gloves, so it must be millions by now).

There's also a weighty on-line petition for Cummings to go over his non-compliance with his own rules – but shouldn't he really go on the grounds of incompetence? We're Europe/world-beaters in terms of numbers of deaths, deaths per million inhabitants, and we still have the highest number of new infections over the last 14 days in Europe.

So those inglorious outcomes arise from what? A muddled, changing, tardy, slogan-ridden strategy (though it's not worthy of that title) following a failure to plan and prepare for a global pandemic despite warnings and a dry-run in 2016. I wonder why no notice was taken of that?

Cummings, as the PM's special adviser has to bear much of the responsibility for this – we appear to have followed DC's political interpretation of the science, not the pragmatic example of other countries who have managed the pandemic far better. Is anyone going to be held accountable? If Johnson had any sense he would sack Cummings on competence grounds alone, and blame him for the whole appalling tragedy.

Phil Green

My wife is in the Nightingale McMillan ward with a few days left to live. Only two family members are allowed to see her, and that includes me.

Dominic Cummings has given her a funeral with her family and friends, because why should I stick to the rules



Animal readers of THE NEW EUROPEAN

Readers Sarah and Jon write: "This is Stanley, he's seven years old and lives in Chesterfield. He's only recently started reading the paper after moving on from sitting on a pizza box and here he is sitting on a previous animal reader. Stanley hates all dogs, but we do tell him that unfortunately, not everything is so black and white."

■ Does the animal who runs your household read *TNE*? Send photographic evidence and crucial biographical details to letters@theneweuropean.co.uk, putting 'Animal Readers' in the subject field.

now? As far as I'm concerned lockdown is over and wait for the massive second wave.

Ken Glenn

If anyone is setting out towards a beauty spot, 'to test their eyesight', may I recommend George Orwell's *Animal Farm* as the reading matter to take along.

In that novella, the animals strive hard to achieve collective success; "they grudged no effort or sacrifice". After every setback, Boxer the workhorse resolves, "I will work harder". But the pigs are concerned only with their own interests and undermine all the principles established at the outset.

Finally, the other animals discover to their dismay that the most vital principle of all – that, "all animals are equal" no longer applies. It has become, "all animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others".

Dr Creina Mansfield

You use the word "nerd" to describe Dominic Cummings (Front cover, *TNE* #196). This may perhaps be a misuse of the word.

It originated as a base insult; the original being KNURD which is a "backward drunk".

Alan Crow
Old Whittington

As a former teacher, I see little Dominic sitting behind his desk making up the most elaborate story. I don't believe a word of it, and I'll bet lots of other teachers are saying the same.

Where is there any evidence? We only have his word to take for that and all the rest is just stories.

As for Downing Street vouching for him, do you remember friends at school asking you to 'cover' for them? This is just that.

If at any point he did actually "take medical advice" it was probably from Dr Liam Fox.

Peter Tyzack
Severn Beach

Johnson's weak acceptance of the wrecking ball that Cummings has driven through the government's coronavirus policy reveals just how dependent he is on his special adviser. The Rod Hull and Emu analogy with Johnson as a rather more subdued bird immediately springs to mind.

But Cummings has learned arrogance from Boris Johnson, the Old Etonian, that mere plebs can be disregarded. The elite, now including Cummings, are not bound by lockdown restraints, that is for lesser mortals. Cummings claimed special understanding of ordinary people. He is now totally out of touch.

Andrew Milroy

Brexit is back

Andrew Adonis, in *TNE* #196, suggests that Brexit may come back into play. As long ago as November 2019 a report was submitted to parliament containing evidence of Russian interference in the 2016 referendum but, for whatever reason, was withheld from scrutiny by Boris Johnson until after the 2019 general

election. With crucial decisions on Brexit about to be made, the disclosure of that evidence is now long overdue. Both parliament and the electorate deserve to be reassured that Brexit is based on a secure foundation.

Derek Mottershead
Southsea

We were told that Brexit would have little or no impact on UK GDP, so the government must have seen the initial reports of the Covid-19 virus as being merely a bad annual flu and thought that it might explain away any falls in GDP.

Now we know the virus is having a far greater impact and any money that might have been spent to keep GDP numbers stable after Brexit will have gone on keeping the economy running during the pandemic.

I am sure that one day we will get back to 2019 levels, but when we do the world will have moved on. What will we have lost during that period?

Trevor G. Bacon
Westcliff-on-Sea

Copying Corbyn

Up to now Johnson had a triple strength political honeymoon, generated by huge electoral success, 'getting Brexit done' (part one, anyway), and widespread deep sympathy after his Covid-19 brush with death. His government's risible defence of Cummings has lost him that third fillip, and jeopardizes more. It reveals his leadership as curiously similar to Jeremy Corbyn's, who also rode on a wave after a degree of electoral success, but first lost sway when he proved unready to discipline his friend Ken Livingstone. That allowed twin narratives of weak leadership, and woeful toleration of anti-Semitism space to build and helped wreck his term as leader. Johnson is now allowing triple narratives of weakness, incompetence and incredibility similar opportunity.

Anthony Thacker
Hinckley

Boris Johnson has made some significant pledges during his career of which many have not, or are unlikely to, come to fruition – such as on Covid-19 and Brexit.

What Arthur Balfour said early on of Winston Churchill might therefore also apply to Johnson: "I thought he was a young man of promise, but it appears he is a young man of promises."

At least Churchill made amends during his lifetime.

Roger Hinds
Surrey



Is Trump the worst president ever?



TIM BRADFORD

What's going on?

IS BEING A STUPID LYING RACIST DESPOT REALLY THAT BAD?

GRAB THEM BY THE PUSSY

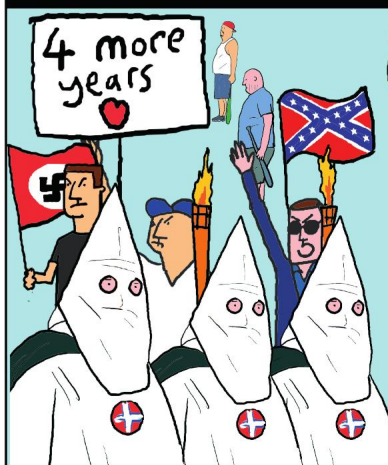
CLIMATE CHANGE? DON'T BELIEVE IT

CORONAVIRUS IS A DEMOCRAT HOAX

POLICE... PLEASE DON'T BE TOO NICE



IF HE'S SO AWFUL WHY DO SO MANY "GOOD PEOPLE" LIKE HIM?



HE EVEN WALKED TO A CHURCH RECENTLY. HE'S A TRUE BELIEVER



HE'S NOT AFRAID TO GO TO WAR. (AGAINST HIS OWN CITIZENS)



Amid the pandemic, the world's most powerful democracy is burning with racial injustice and, having threatened China over Hong Kong while fuelling unrest in his own country with incendiary tweets, the president runs to hide in his bunker.

Here in the UK, the world's oldest democracy is crumbling under the mismanagement of Covid and the corrosive influence of ingrained privilege as Boris Johnson claims to have put one-rule-for-the-plebs-another-for-the-elite-Cummings on the naughty step.

If archaic voting systems led to these anomalies, abominations and aberrations, might sheer public embarrassment and national humiliation rid us of these appalling men?

Amanda Baker
Edinburgh

Back off BBC

The reaction of the BBC to the complaints (presumably from Tories) on Emily Maitlis' recent performance on *Newsnight* is shameful.

According to the BBC's response: "*Newsnight* risked giving the perception that the BBC was taking sides." So it should, providing it takes the side of honesty, integrity and fairness.

Tony Olsson
Kirkby-in-Ashfield

Santa Clarke

I almost totally agree with everything Alastair Campbell has to say but for the bit ("This sorry affair is more about Johnson than Cummings", *TNE* #196) where he says "...I remember the fine words of then cabinet minister Charles Clarke when asked if he might dress up as Santa Claus.... "oh f**k off, Alastair".

I distinctly remember Charles dressing up as Santa Claus for a meeting of the Norwich Labour Party one Christmas. Don't think it did him any harm though.

Cllr Vaughan Thomas
Lord Mayor of Norwich

More on Haw-Haw

One key reason for British listeners being hooked into Lord Haw-Haw's 'Germany Calling' broadcasts was omitted from Richard Luck's excellent feature ("The plummy voice of the Third Reich", *TNE* #196). William Joyce was also a very valued information service.

My father-in-law, Archie Kiddey, a bomber pilot, was shot down over the Netherlands in July 1941. A telegram received by his wife shortly afterwards was short and direct: "Regret to inform you your husband missing on active service letter follows." A letter from his commanding officer did indeed follow with very little additional information.

With the attrition rate so high in Bomber Command my mother-in-law deemed herself a widowed single mother, although her own mother and siblings held a flame of hope for his survival.

It was Haw-Haw who broadcast the good news some weeks later – "To Mrs Veronica Kiddey" – that he was safe, well and in an RAF prison camp. Her sister, tuned in at the time, heard the news and raced across the city to inform her.

I gather this 'information bulletin' regarding missing servicemen and news of their survival was one of Joyce's regular 'punctuations' within his dark propaganda. This was no doubt a tactic to suggest the Third Reich had some humanity but nevertheless invaluable to those tormented by not knowing the whereabouts of their missing menfolk.

Lindah Kiddey
Radcliffe-on-Trent

I enjoyed Richard Luck's portrayal of William Joyce and the mesmeric hold he had over the great British public in the dark days of the Second World War. Just what we need in this era of fake news.

Luck doesn't get it quite right, however, when he says that Joyce was the only British broadcaster who was hanged for treasonous collaboration with the Nazis. John Amery, son of Conservative MP

Leo Amery, and brother of Conservative MP Julian Amery, made pro-Nazi broadcasts from Germany and was hanged for treason in 1945. Only a cynic would suggest that we don't hear much about Amery's treachery because his father and brother were huge figures in Conservative circles over many decades. Julian married Harold Macmillan's daughter in 1950 and remained in parliament till 1992.

Paul Pender
Edinburgh

I read the article about William Joyce with some curiosity as I have a long time interest in Joyce and his life. He was a very talented but deeply angry man.

His family were what Americans would call "Tories to the Irish Revolution" who were loyal to the UK and left Ireland after their property was destroyed during the Troubles following 1918. They were living in Dulwich during the war – there is an account of people vilifying him in an air raid shelter there and being nudged into silence by neighbours as his family were listening. Joyce's brother served honourably in the RAF during the war and retired to Ireland. William Joyce continued to hate people in Germany, and was involved in fights with German colleagues in air raid shelters. Lieutenant Geoffrey Perry who shot and arrested Joyce – the ferocious anti-Semite – was a Jewish refugee, Horst Pinschewer, from Nazi Germany, who had Anglicised his name.

Joyce was the last person to be hanged in England for treason. Rebecca West pointed out the absurdity of him having the benefits of a falsely-claimed UK citizenship but not having to pay the price for treason because of the false claim. In 1976 he became one of the hanged people who were re-interred by their families after the abolition of capital punishment. His daughter had him buried in the New Cemetery at Galway City in the land of his forbears. A crowd including TV reporters from the UK was present when he was re-interred and one reporter asked his daughter if she believed her father was a traitor – she said "no" and an older man in a

strangled English accent said furiously: "Oh yes he was!" The daughter – probably exhausted after a lifetime of defending her father – said resignedly: "Oh well – perhaps he was then."

Some years ago I saw the grave and the lettering had started to fall off the stone.

Lawrence Linehan,
Wooburn Green

More care needed

Good to see Ian Birrell's incisive and timely report on the care homes industry

▶ Turn to page 16

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AGENDA

▶ From page 15

("Underlying conditions", *TNE* #195). A sector of the wider social care economy that the general public knows little about, and politicians generally less.

Previous investigations into the state of the industry (the term seems appropriate if uncomfortable) have drawn attention to the discrepancy between the individual purchaser of care and the organised block of local authorities/NHS.

The power imbalance leaves individuals effectively subsidising publicly funded placement costs. So even the free marketeers would not recognise this as an efficiently functioning operation.

An investigation by the Competition and Markets Authority has been called for but not taken forward.

A further priority concern is, of course, the end of free movement. Care staff wages fall well short of the income threshold for migrants proposed in the Immigration Bill currently before parliament.

Clinical and managerial staff may make the £26,400 level but will have to go through a lengthy and bureaucratic (and expensive) process to come to the UK. Uncertainty and a feeling of being heroes today but forgotten tomorrow are likely to have a growing negative impact on the quality of care.

The promised Green Paper on social care was delayed seven times under the May government, and we have yet to see Mr Johnson's plan he told us was ready last July. Is there a popular feeling to put Brexit on hold and deal with this first?

Charlie Clerke
London N14

Brave Italy

I am surprised that none of the contributors to the discussion of Italy's mistaken reputation for cowardice (Letters, *TNE* #196) has yet mentioned the extraordinary bravery shown by the Italian resistance movements (both communist and royalist – often bitter rivals but equally courageous). Their struggle against the often barbaric tyranny of the German army and Italian fascists, supported by the population despite revenge taken upon multiple hostages, is illustrated by an amazing literature, in particular the novels and short stories of Beppe Fenoglio, based on his own long fight first with the communists, and then with the royalist Badogliani. They are nearly all masterpieces.

Max Gauna
Sheffield

View from NZ

Having spent my last two holidays in New Zealand, I've become aware of the output of the nations public service broadcaster Radio New Zealand and its website. I still listen in this country when I need a break from the BBC.

Its website recently published an article "UK's leaders want a disengaged public", parts of which are worth highlighting here: "One of the benefits of

a country as small as New Zealand is the unavoidable intimacy of government. There can be no faceless authoritarian state when citizens regularly run into MPs at the supermarket, so some level of openness is required.

"Things are different here [in the UK]. The featureless ministers, the droning answers that say nothing, the avoidance of anything resembling liveliness or humour or a shared acknowledgement of humanity – all of it is intentional to keep the public at arm's length.

"That's not just because the Tories hate their own constituents, but because a disengaged population who thinks politics is boring and inaccessible poses no threat to power.

"They want people to leave these briefings befuddled and bored, deciding they'll use their own common sense rather than listen to what a bunch of Westminster elites have to say.

"Then when a deadly virus kills a vast swathe of the population because public health advice wasn't followed, they can say it was our fault."

Daniel Burton

England does not equal Britain

I always feel a certain disquiet when I read articles such as Andrew Adonis' "We need more education, education, education" (*TNE*, #195).

When authors talk about the "England's public education system" and "England's school system", without mentioning that there are other systems within the UK, I can't help but feel this slightly encourages the view that England is Britain and Britain is England.

Similarly when BBC news reports that, for example, crime or university results are up or down in England without referring to other parts of Britain, it is similarly unhelpful.

The sports part of the analogy is the Union Flag flown at England cricket, rugby and football matches when surely the flag of St George would be appropriate? If an article is about one specific part of the UK then feel free to say so.

David Lippiatt
Deanston, Stirling

Lockdown upside

I have been fortunate enough to have received or shop-bought (and on occasions, at airports mainly, both) a copy of every edition of this newspaper. Running a new business, family and social life have taken their toll on my ability to do justice to my purchases.

I am now doing so with great pleasure and a Belgian beer in the sunshine. Thank you for your contribution to my hopefully still-intact sanity.

Marc Folgate
Oundle

Unfinished business

BARNABY TOWNS on the still unresolved issue of voting rights for EU citizens



Just over one year ago, more than one million people were denied their right to vote. Britain's last set of European elections, held on May 23, 2019, may not seem of particular importance now that the UK has left the EU. But an important democratic principle and civil rights issue is at stake.

This is the finding of the Electoral Commission, the independent institution that regulates party and election finances and sets standards for how elections should be run. The Commission formally investigated the conduct of this election, producing a report in November that concluded "people who were entitled to vote and wanted to vote in the European parliament elections in the UK were unable to do so." The Commission further found that significant numbers of British citizens resident abroad were unable to exercise their democratic rights.

Following the report, the High Court ruled in January that a court case addressing this denial of voting rights should proceed because of the obvious public interest in the outcome. The case asks the court to rule that last year's disenfranchisement was unlawful, and establish a precedent that discrimination against EU nationals as a group is as unlawful as it is unacceptable in a democracy.

On polling day, EU citizens legally resident in the UK were turned away from polling stations unable to exercise their voting rights – having the right to choose whether to do so in their country of origin or the UK, where they are resident. A requirement for EU nationals to fill in an additional declaration form to register to vote resulted in many being turned away despite being on the electoral register. It soon became clear that many electoral registration officers had not sent the form out to resident EU citizens on their register, or sent it out late. This failure resulted in a huge drop in the number of EU citizens eligible to vote, from over one million to some 300,000.

A new court case is crowdfunded by the 3million, a grassroots group which defends the rights of EU27 nationals in the UK and also is supported by British in Europe, which campaigns for the rights of British citizens in Europe post-Brexit. The court case isn't merely about righting a wrong but also establishing the principle that the government has a legal duty to ensure that all those who have a right to vote are able to do so.

As the local and mayoral elections that were due to take place this month were

postponed by a year due to coronavirus, many supporters of the group now fear it is the last time they were able to vote in any election. While most rights to live and remain are being secured through agreements with the EU, the UK's request that this include retaining local election rights was rejected by the EU, which argued that they are a sovereign national matter, not an EU competence.

The government subsequently pledged to retain the legislation that allows EU citizens to vote and stand in the local and mayoral elections that were due to take place on May 5. The postponement of those elections has not been matched by a commitment to retain that pledge for a further year, let alone to commitments beyond.

On the contrary, to the alarm of many EU citizens, the government has also announced a strategy since, of pursuing reciprocal bilateral agreements on local voting rights with each individual EU nation, which threaten to disenfranchise some but not others. This has only led to positive responses from three countries so far – Spain, Portugal and Luxembourg, not for lack of goodwill from others. France and Germany have constitutional prohibitions on voting rights for non-EU nationals, but ex-pat Brits will still be able to vote locally in Denmark, Finland, Sweden, the Netherlands while their citizens in the UK merely have that verbal





UNDEMOCRATIC:
Preparations
for last May's
European
elections at St
Saviour's church
hall in London's
Herne Hill

Photo: Getty
Images

commitment to being allowed to vote in the local elections which didn't take place on May 5. These countries use the principle of universally granting local voting rights to all residents regardless of nationality, which is also applied by Australia, New Zealand, Jersey and most recently Scotland and Wales.

It doesn't have to be this way. As Britain moves to an immigration system that is supposedly "more fair and equal", it should bear in mind that Commonwealth and Irish citizens enjoy voting rights at all elections in the UK and that the government granted these rights without being asked to do so and without regard to whether they were reciprocated. More than 100 years after the Representation of the People Act 1918, which enshrined these rights, we surely should consider whether it's acceptable to treat other immigrants as less deserving.

In her recent speech presenting the Immigration Bill, Priti Patel suggested that she wants a future under which all immigrants are treated equally and fairly. During the 2016 referendum, Boris Johnson pledged that post-Brexit "[t]here will be no change for EU citizens already lawfully resident in the UK. These EU citizens will automatically be granted indefinite leave to remain in the UK and be treated no less favourably than they are at present".

He reaffirmed this pledge in his first House of Commons statement as prime minister, saying that he wished to "repeat unequivocally our guarantee to the 3.2 million EU nationals now living and working among us". He added: "I thank them for their contribution to our society and for their patience, and I can assure them that, under this government, they will have the absolute certainty for the right to live and remain."

The concept of 'no change' must include retaining the franchise to vote in local elections, and if Patel's words are to be taken at value, then any change should actually be a levelling up of electoral rights to make all immigrants more equal.

It is unacceptable in the home of the mother of parliaments, that people who were entitled to vote in the UK were unable to do so. The High Court should now rule last year's disenfranchisement unlawful, and establish a precedent that discrimination against EU nationals as a group indeed is, in a democracy, as unlawful as it is unacceptable, the government would do well to make a clear legal commitment to protecting the franchise of these people to vote in future.

■ Barnaby Towns is a former Conservative Party special adviser

A Brexit pause is essential now

LEONIE COOPER, a Labour member of the London Assembly, makes the common sense case for an extension to EU negotiations



Brexit is, at last, yesterday's battle. As everyone must now accept, that fight is over. Those supporting Remain lost, and while we may make the case for Britain to maintain close relations with the EU, we must also recognise that the government has the majority it needs in parliament to deliver the Brexit it wants.

That Brexit may even mean leaving the transitional period without a trade deal. It's a course of action that is fraught with difficulty at the best of times, but in this period of unprecedented uncertainty, I think it would be irresponsible not to set out the risks of doing so, and to explain why I oppose a hard, cliff-edge Brexit now more than ever.

In my heart of hearts, I continue to believe that Britain would be better off in, or at least close, to the EU. There's only so much political energy one can expend when there's little hope of delivering the desired outcome. But influencing the outcome is what we must try and do. With negotiations sidelined while the government grapples with both the economic and health consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, in just a couple of months from now we will have passed the point of no return. June 30 is the UK's final day on which it can request an extension to the transitional period, of either one or two years.

Right now, Brexit is understandably far from most of our minds. The impacts of Covid-19 – social isolation, lost loved ones, financial stress, the needs and heroics of our health and social care workers – are what is occupying all of us.

“No-one can blame our government for the recent scenes of empty shop shelves – but there can be no excuse for enacting this outcome deliberately. The 'hostile environment' has already combined with the pandemic to create the very real prospect of fruit and vegetables rotting in British fields this summer

The priority for most people right now is just getting by and getting through each day. Trade deals, fraught talks in Brussels, battles in parliament and huge demonstrations aren't just yesterday's news – the very concept of them has become implausible.

It is precisely because of these changed conditions that an extension to the transitional period is needed so urgently. I don't say this because I'm raging against the dying of the light, desperate for a fleeting few years closer to Europe, before inevitably being cast adrift – I say this because of the current turbulence.

The government is clearly set on a hard Brexit and having won the election they should ordinarily be free to pursue that outcome. But these are extraordinary times.

We don't know when this crisis will end. In the intervening period, our priorities should be saving lives and protecting our economy as best as we can. All of our energies and every lever of government should be focused on those outcomes. We simply cannot allow extensive resources to be poured into trade negotiations (not just with the EU, but the rest of the world too) or no-deal preparation. We do not have the capacity and it would be a huge distraction.

Worse still is the disruption that no deal would bring to supply chains. Just last month, secretary of state for transport Grant Shapps lauded deals with France and Ireland to keep freight routes open, and goods and medicine flowing. But the frictionless continuity of these freight routes is completely dependent upon those structures of the EU and EEA that we all take for granted – the single market, the customs union, all the common rules on goods and services.

It would be the greatest challenge our country has faced in decades to rip all that up in normal times. But to knowingly do that when our 'just-in-time' systems are at once so fragile and so important, would be a truly wanton act of destruction. The pause button is there, and the EU – aware as much of impacts here, as on either side of the Irish and North Seas – has repeatedly indicated a willingness to make use of it.

No-one can blame our government for the recent scenes of empty shop shelves – but there can be no excuse for enacting this outcome deliberately. The 'hostile environment' has already combined with the pandemic to create the very real prospect of fruit and vegetables rotting in British fields this summer.

So my plea is a simple one, made in good faith. Not to stop or reverse Brexit. Not to stay close to the EU, in perpetuity, by the back door. Nothing to do with my own views on London and Britain's place in Europe. It is simply a plea for common sense to prevail, for the government to recognise its limitations, and in the short-term focus on the common good. To concentrate on eradicating this awful disease and choose – as we can – to fight just one battle at a time.

■ Leonie Cooper is Labour's London Assembly economy spokesperson

AGENDA

We are being fattened up for a one-way trade deal with Trump



Covid is getting the headlines, but a trade agreement with the US is fast taking shape. And it does not look like a good deal, says FRANCIS BECKETT



Britain is being fattened up for a trade deal with Donald Trump designed to strengthen his chances of re-election in November.

The latest move is the Agriculture Bill, which has passed all its stages in the House of Commons and is due for its second reading in the House of Lords on June 10, and which effectively removes both food standard safeguards and protections for British farmers.

Its significance lies, not in what it says, but in what it does not say. The most important farming legislation in generations, it was the opportunity to replace EU food safety standards and protections for rural industries with a home-grown version.

Neil Parish, Conservative MP for Tiverton and Honiton, tabled an amendment to protect UK farmers from low-standard food imports. It would have prevented future trade deals from

allowing food into the UK which was not produced to the standards required of our own producers.

The government ensured its defeat by 328 to 277 votes. Parish could muster only 22 Conservative colleagues to vote for it. And only one brave Conservative MP – Helen Grant, MP for Maidstone and the Weald – voted against the unamended Bill. Conservatives with rural constituencies, who have previously expressed serious concerns about the Bill, fell into line.

A former Ulster Unionist MEP, Jim Nicholson, says it is potentially “the last nail in the coffin for agriculture in Northern Ireland” because “it opens the floodgates to cheap food imports into the UK from around the world. This food will not have been produced to the same standards achieved consistently by farmers in Northern Ireland.”

This means, among other things, the famous chlorinated chicken. An RSPCA report explains: “The problem the EU has with chlorinated chicken is that antimicrobial treatments can be used to compensate for poor hygiene along the supply chain, particularly on farms for example. Ever since 1997, member states of the EU have refused to accept imports of chlorine-treated poultry and this has been a point of contention with the US. The EU maintains that chemical washes are a form of quick-fix covering up for lower treatment standards, including lower animal welfare standards.”

US chickens are raised in such

cramped conditions that the only way to stop them arriving on our dinner tables diseased is to dunk them in chlorine.

The government has pressed ahead despite opposition from all the food producers, including the British Poultry Council and even the National Farmers’ Union, normally a loyal Tory ally. “The most significant deficiency with the Bill is the absence of any commitment or means of upholding British farming production standards in the context of international trade negotiations” an NFU statement says.

“The NFU believes that it would be futile to develop a comprehensive and ambitious domestic support policy, simply for UK farmers’ efforts to be undermined through the importation of products not produced to the same level of environmental or animal health/welfare standards expected of them domestically.”

Farmers Weekly columnist Jacob Anthony puts it bluntly: “The fact that the majority of the people running this country are happy to use agriculture as a bargaining chip has left me and many other farmers furious.

“We have trusted the elected politicians to protect our industry, as well as the country’s food security. However, they have now made a decision that is likely to have a major impact on our ability to remain competitive and keep our businesses afloat.”

The government ignores this because the Bill is one of the building blocks

paving the way for a quick and grubby deal with Trump. Another building block is a swift end to the brief love-in they have been forced to undergo with the public sector during the Covid crisis.

In his first speech after returning from illness, Boris Johnson went out of his way to say: “Without our private sector, without the drive and commitment of the wealth creators of this country, there will be no economy to speak of, there will be no cash to pay for our public services, no way of funding our NHS.”

He meant: we have to be nice to the public sector right now, but in the long run, only the market matters. So while businesses and charities are being helped through the crisis, local government has been told by the communities secretary, Robert Jenrick, that they will receive no extra help with the additional strain on services caused by the pandemic, and the huge hole in income from airports, public transport, parking, and everything else local councils do. Some are likely to issue Section 114 notices, in effect declaring bankruptcy.

As long ago as 1989, the late Roy Jenkins asked: “May we be left uneasily poised... between the US and continental Europe, without the private generosity of the former or the more adequate public funding of the latter?” It’s actually been worse than Jenkins feared. We have lurched crazily between the two, and Brexit is the biggest lurch of all.

Keir Starmer told me when I



TROUBLED WATERS: A cargo ship keeps trade going during the Covid-19 lockdown. The government is preparing to complete a trade deal with the US that will hit food standards and British farmers

Photo: Getty Images

interviewed him for these pages that Johnson's likely trade deal with the US was "not just swapping one trade deal for another, it is swapping one set of values, principles and standards for another set of values, principles and standards, and the whole economic model of this country will be affected by it."

He said: "We are about to veer forcibly in the US direction and it will have real implications for our economic model. We are by geography and history European, and the more so since the end of the Second World War. Rule of law, common standards, threshold standards, conflict resolution. That's the platform that was built up after the second world war. To shift away from that at this moment is quite profound."

Whether Johnson has personally thought all that through, we cannot be sure, but Dominic Cummings has.

And he knows it's urgent. Never mind that there's a crisis on – the deal has to be done now, while Donald Trump still needs some sort of triumph to offer his electors in November.

Otherwise, Trump might lose, and this would be a disaster for the Johnson government; for Johnson cannot be sure that Joe Biden won't take the same view as his old boss, president Obama, who warned before the referendum: "Maybe some point down the line there might be a UK-US trade agreement, but it's not going to happen any time soon because our focus is in negotiating with a big bloc, the European Union, to get a trade

agreement done... The UK is going to be in the back of the queue."

Obama knew, and Trump knows, the deal was going to matter far more to the UK outside Europe than to the US. The US economy is six times as big as ours, and the US accounts for 13% of our exports, while we only account for 3% of theirs.

For Trump, a UK trade deal is mainly valuable because it can be used as leverage when negotiating a deal with the EU. Ministers say they hope to maximise our reach in global data and artificial intelligence, in line with the Conservative Party's manifesto; to sell professional services, food processing and car manufacturing; and to benefit small and medium sized enterprises in mostly unspecified ways. For Trump it's a luxury. For the UK, if we stick to the deadline of the end of this year, it's an insecure lifeline.

That's why the government was prepared to stake all on keeping Dominic Cummings, but not lift a finger to keep epidemiologist professor Neil Ferguson as a scientific adviser. Ferguson only knows how to fight the virus. Cummings knows something really important: how to deliver a fast Brexit and dress up a US trade deal to look as though it was a replacement.

The government wants us to think it's focused on Covid. In reality, it's focused on turning us at breakneck speed into the sort of place Donald Trump wants to do business with. Without Trump, its strategy disintegrates.

Recovery option that compounds the virus crisis

Environmental campaigner KIERRA BOX warns of the dangers of nations pursuing deregulation as a route to recovery



With the dual emergencies of the coronavirus crisis and the imminent end of the UK's Brexit transition period, the idea of throwing the rulebook out the window to secure quick trade deals might seem appealing. But it would be dangerously counterproductive to let the crisis response become a gateway for interest groups to weaken the very laws and regulations that keep us safe. The government's insistence on carrying out trade negotiations with both the EU and the US during a pandemic, combined with political pressure to secure deals before the US elections and the end of transition, seems destined to result in knee-jerk decisions and set a worryingly low bar on oversight.

If a pandemic were a 'normal' kind of danger, like falling, responding would be instinctive for all of us. Stay away from the edge, look before you leap, hold tight to the rail. There would be outrage if our leaders continued to urge us along a crumbling cliffside path, citing common sense while hurling the safety barriers over the edge. But this is exactly what is happening. In just a few months, we've seen worrying calls at an international level for the easing of environmental, labour and consumer protections, cynically rebranded as 'trade barriers'.

Rational calls for an anti-protectionist approach to trade in medical goods during the pandemic have already begun to drift into worrying arguments that continued liberalisation will be needed for recovery. But entering the race to the bottom would simply pile new crises upon the pandemic, like dealing with the burning house that is the climate emergency by settling light to the fire extinguisher.

The starting gun on this race has already been fired around the world. As some EU businesses asked for a halt to the implementation of new laws designed to raise environmental standards, lobbyists from North America to Australasia have successfully rolled back existing protections. The American Petroleum Institute secured a suspension of pollution monitoring requirements, with no oversight from the US Environmental Protection Agency even if public health is threatened. Logging companies have argued against the need to prove their product is not from illegally deforested areas for a decade – but it was the excuse of the Covid-19 economic slowdown that the Indonesian government gave for cutting verification measures this year.

In light of research suggesting a link between an increased risk of zoonotic (i.e. transmissible from animals to humans) diseases such as Covid-19 and biodiversity loss – which in turn is driven by climate change, pollution, land use changes and the expansion of industrial farming – it is especially concerning that the UK is pursuing a deal with the US that would essentially prop up these practices. US negotiators have already questioned UK bans on the import of livestock pumped with unnecessary antibiotics and hormones, banned any mention of climate change in trade negotiations, and suggested that any trade agreement should allow genetically modified goods and restricted pesticides and chemicals onto the UK market. A US-UK trade deal rushed through during a global pandemic has the potential to do serious harm to our environmental standards.

Meanwhile, in the EU, we're seeing a worrying lack of progress on a negotiation still being held to arbitrary time limits, in part because of the UK's reluctance to compromise on joining EU level playing field standards for things like workers' rights and environmental protection. Ending the transition period without an agreement on December 31 would interrupt our food supply, leave us with restricted access to our nearest trading partner and could lead to a severe drop in standards. The planned UK Environment Bill, vital to well-functioning environmental governance in the future and already delayed by last year's prorogation and snap election, has now been further delayed by lockdown.

A global response is needed to address the medical and economic crises caused by the pandemic, but that response must not be a lowest common denominator approach designed to stimulate economies at the cost of our health and environment. A cleaner and healthier future will not be secured through rushed trade deals; ripping up the rulebooks on trade will not get us to more resilient, stronger and more sustainable international supply chains.

It will take evidence-based cooperation between nations to support trade in goods and services produced in ways proven to support human health and biodiversity.

Fear – of a pandemic, change, falling – can make us freeze. That wouldn't be helpful either. Navigating this dangerous path with the safety guards still in place would be good, but building a new road would be better. If Covid-19 has shown us that we are all in danger of falling, we can respond best by finding new ways of doing things that help us step away from the environmental cliff-edge altogether.

■ Kierra Box is from Friends of the Earth; additional contributions from Chloe Alexander, from CHEM Trust, and Orla Delargy from Sustain

AGENDA

Covid exposes cracks in Putin's power

The pandemic has highlighted the Russian president's many weaknesses, says PAUL KNOTT. His downfall could come quicker than we think



Not for the first time, speculation is growing about the future of Russian president Vladimir Putin. While he has always survived previous crises and his grip on power is tight, the end of his rule could come sooner than many observers anticipate. Whatever difficulties democracies have endured during the last decade, the greater certainty is that regimes like Putin's usually do fall – often suddenly and painfully for the ruler concerned.

Such collapses frequently appear less surprising in hindsight. Beneath the veneer of impregnability, the signs were usually accumulating all along. And Putin unquestionably has decay and difficulties piling up all around him.

His handling of the Covid-19 crisis has been lamentable. Despite the Kremlin's significant under-reporting of the true figures, Russia now has more recorded cases of infection than any country apart from the United States (which has well over double the population).

In keeping with his fellow populists, Putin initially reacted to the pandemic outbreak by denying it existed in his country.

Less typically for a supposed strongman, Putin then largely disappeared from public view. This is a tactic Putin often deploys in times of trouble, dating back to the Kursk submarine disaster shortly after he took office.

Putin's disappearing acts are designed to avoid him being associated with bad news. Passing the buck to his underlings allows him to reappear later to berate them for messing up and claim credit for resolving the problem once it has started to recede.

This approach proved ill-suited to the Covid-19 crisis, which is too enduring for Putin to hide from until it blows over. But since returning to the scene he has unhelpfully exhibited the demeanour of a dictator who has been detached from ordinary life for too long.

Putin has frequently appeared distracted and uninterested in the human impact of the crisis. His main concerns

appear to be the economic damage – which is doubtless worth worrying about – and his own plunging approval ratings.

Worse, the crisis is profoundly exposing how Putin's failures have left Russia weak and unable to cope with it, at the cost of thousands of unnecessary deaths.

Putin has been fortunate that most of his period in power has coincided with sustained spells of high prices for Russia's most significant exports, oil and gas.

Tragically for the Russian people, much of the immense wealth generated has been squandered on flashy construction projects and misappropriation on an unprecedented scale by the regime and its cronies. The

LAMENTABLE: President Vladimir Putin during a video conference to discuss opening Russian military medical facilities for Covid-19 patients. Putin is facing mounting criticism for his handling of the crisis

Photo: Getty Images

full cost of the country's corruption is now becoming lethally apparent.

The vast sums that have been siphoned in this way could have been spent on building a world-class public service infrastructure for Russia, such as a high-quality healthcare system.

Instead, Russia's overworked and underpaid medical professionals (many have not received the modest bonuses they were promised for working on Covid wards) are suffering extraordinary levels of infection and death.

According to a *New York Times* report, by mid-May more than 180 medics had died, 75% of the staff at one Moscow hospital were sick and 1,465 healthcare workers in St Petersburg had contracted the virus, a sixth of the city's total cases.

Much of this can be attributed to personal protective equipment being either faulty or non-existent. Some staff have reportedly been forced to continue working while unwell, compounding the spread of the virus.

Meanwhile, medical students have been press-ganged into service, on pain of being expelled from their courses if they refuse.

The military is the only part of the public sector that has been comprehensively upgraded during Putin's rule.

Its new high-tech weaponry has been deployed to intervene in Syria and Ukraine and pulverise the poor civilians of those countries. The prestige this ruthless display of power has supposedly





brought Russia may prove fleeting, as its inability to extricate itself from the conflicts it has fuelled starts to bite.

Russia's military activities and breaches of international law in invading Ukraine have brought international sanctions down on its head.

These have caused a recession in Russia. Average incomes have fallen by 7.5% since the invasion of Crimea in 2014. This grim economic situation will be compounded by the downturn about to hit as a result of the Covid pandemic.

Russia's position is worsened by Putin's failure to use the good years to diversify its economy from its extreme dependence on oil and gas.

The Russian budget requires an oil price of \$42 a barrel in order to break

even. With global demand having collapsed and pushed prices down to around \$20, this level looks unlikely to be attained any time soon.

In these circumstances, Putin's unwise decision to engineer an oil war with Saudi Arabia in early March and create a supply glut on the market now looks even more short-sighted.

The dangers of this course of action could have been foreseen because China, a crucial market for Russian oil and gas, was then in the grip of Covid-19 and global economic output was already slowing down.

In many places, Putin's litany of failures would be sufficient to spark the overthrow of the regime. But there are reasons why this may not happen quickly in Russia.

Previous Russian finance ministers have had the good sense to stash a portion of Russia's national resource wealth in the National Welfare Fund, keeping it away from more rapacious hands.

This fund is thought to contain at least \$120 billion (roughly 8% of GDP); enough to partially prop up the pillars of the Russian economy for about two more years.

Beyond big business, there will be considerably more pain to come for the Russian people. But their historical experience of repeated hardship and oppression gives them both a high pain threshold and low expectations of their political leaders.

They also have relatively recent experience of the risks of political upheaval – the turmoil of the early post-Soviet years saw many people's savings eliminated and living standards collapse.

These factors combine to create a widespread reluctance to challenge even a government as incompetent as Putin's.

His protection is reinforced by his near complete control of the media and information supply. Relentless propaganda has inculcated strong support for his aggressive nationalist agenda, even among the younger generations and despite his many other failings.

Putin uses his control of the media to stymie any potential alternatives to his rule. In a country as vast as Russia, appearing on television is still vital for anyone seeking to build political support. Denying access to would-be challengers means many people find it hard to imagine anyone other than Putin being in charge.

Another possible route to Putin's demise is a Kremlin palace coup. Putin's power lies in his being accepted as the arbiter and first among equals by the various other elite power brokers.

If his continued rule is seen as putting the whole system and their ill-gotten gains at risk, it is conceivable that some of the elite will seek to avert a spectacular collapse by easing Putin out.

Potential replacements include the mayor of Moscow, Sergei Sobyanin, who has cultivated a reputation for basic competence.

Securing a peaceful, managed transition from Putin is a big 'if' though, given the mistrust and rivalries within the elite that he expertly manipulates. But his problems are mounting. And while it may not happen next week or next month, a sudden and seemingly surprising end to Putin's reign cannot be ruled out.

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All water under the bridge for Dacre

The letter sent to journalists at the *Daily Mail* informing them of their lockdown working arrangements was signed by the proprietor **Lord Rothermere** and **Geordie Greig**, its editor, but not, intriguingly, **Paul Dacre**, the newspaper group's editor-in-chief.

"Paul's many friends and admirers on the paper are concerned that he might not be coming back when all this is over," whispers my informant, possibly with tongue-in-cheek. "Geordie, for one, would be bereft and would miss being able to draw on the great man's many years of experience."

So far as the 72-year-old newspaperman is concerned, his period at the *Mail* – when he single-mindedly championed the cause of Brexit – may all seem like water under the bridge. Still, he has managed to find a way of making money even out of that: the hydroelectric outfit that he runs on his Scottish estate has just reported record profits.

The Canaird River Company Limited, where Dacre, *pictured*, and his son **Alexander** serve as directors, has just revealed that it made £500,000 in 2019, £100,000 up on the £400,000 made in 2018. The latest accounts show ongoing accumulated profits of £1,435,304.

It's a long way from Canaird's first year of trading in 2014, when it posted a £963 loss, though it's still to make the £5 million that Dacre was originally hoping the venture would be worth to him.

Canaird runs a 1.2-megawatt hydro scheme on Dacre's £2.4m 17,000-acre Highlands estate near Ullapool, with his interest in it owned via the Langwell Estate Family Partnership by way of a 40% stake. No news on Langwell's finances, though as it's a private partnership with no requirement to make its accounts public.

Ironically enough, Dacre has been in receipt of tens of thousands of pounds from the EU under the common agricultural policy for his Scottish estate, in addition to his estate in Wadhurst, Sussex.

Red face

Michael Gove's office insisted last week that it wasn't him who'd "liked" hardcore pornography on his Twitter account – "many people have the password to it," said an aide – but it was scarcely good for the wannabe prime minister's image.

Interestingly, during



the coalition years, Gove, as education secretary, had disagreed with **Nick Clegg** that the "menacing" threat of internet pornography should be addressed in schools. He felt it was a matter that should be left to the discretion of teachers.

What with everything else that's going on, his boss **Boris Johnson** is unlikely to be bothered by the story, and, as for the other key relationship in Gove's life – with **Rupert Murdoch** – the newspaper tycoon is also likely to be relaxed. He put **Rebekah Brooks** in charge of his UK operation after her husband **Charlie Brooks** had admitted in the phone-hacking trial of 2014 that he'd attempted to hide a collection of pornographic DVDs in an underground car park lest they be found by the police.

Silent man

Although **Theresa May** has said she understands the public anger against **Dominic Cummings** – she felt he had not "followed the spirit" of the lockdown rules – **David Cameron** has uttered not a word on the subject.

When I inquire if the silent man of British politics would just for once like to express a view on the subject, his factotum **Laurence Mann** – normally very helpful – does not respond. Cameron spoke a lot about morality in public life during his period in No.10 – he liked the idea of a "big society", where everyone played their part – but now appears keen to keep as low a profile as possible.

He has been spending lockdown at his Cotswolds home, but, a keen swimmer, he was no doubt itching to get to his holiday home in Cornwall during the heatwave.

Horse sense

Spare a thought for **Esther McVey**. The Tory Brextemist was in receipt of £2,110 worth of free hospitality at Royal Ascot last year, courtesy of Alizeti Capital Ltd and Normandie Stud Ltd.

This month the five-day event is expected to go ahead behind closed doors so **McVey, pictured**, and other MPs who like a flutter and a few quaffs of champagne will not be admitted. There will be no Royal procession, morning suits or millinery; and, for the first time in her 68-year reign, even **the Queen** will be giving it a miss.



AGENDA

PM's car crash of a book

With Boris Johnson's authority taking a serious dent from his adviser's wayward motoring activities, NICK HOLLAND finds plenty of indicators of the prime minister's own reckless attitude in his 1999 book on driving



As a writer of books and a voracious reader of books I have an eclectic taste when it comes to literature. I believe every tome has its merits, even if they only provoke an unintended laugh or two; and so we come to a book unlike any other I've read: *Life in the Fast Lane*, written by a 1999 vintage Boris Johnson.

Cobbled together from various magazine car review columns, it's the worst motoring book ever written, possibly (with the obvious exception of Jacob Rees-Mogg's history of the Victorian age, or as he likes to call it 'the present') the worst book ever written. It's also essential reading, especially in the light of Dominic Cummings' recent indiscretions, as the future prime minister gives us his views on motoring laws, morality, women, and life in general.

As a non-driver at the time, I was rather surprised to be gifted a copy of *Life in the Fast Lane* 20 years ago; it was an eye-opening read then, and is even more astonishing when I read it back now.

I wouldn't normally accuse Boris of being a visionary of any kind, but many of his mumbled attempts at *bon mots* within the book are incredibly prescient for the situation we find ourselves in today.

Just as Cummings seems to think motoring laws (which require a cast-iron certainty that your eyesight is up to the job), and regulations in general, are not for the likes of him, *Life in the Fast Lane* leaves little doubt that Johnson shares similar beliefs.

On one level, it's a far too long confession of law breaking on a scale that we surely shouldn't have expected from a prime minister. Exhibit A, m'lud, is this charming description of Johnson's favourite place to park in Oxford: "My favourite parking spot was on the yellow lines by the squash courts in Jowett Walk and sometimes, it is true, I got a ticket. But what did I care? The Italian Stallion [his Fiat] had a James Bond feature that enabled me to beat the fuzz. As a means of eluding the law, it was far better than a gadget that squirted the road with oil or tin-tacks, or rear-firing cannon mounted by the exhaust. The Stallion had Belgian plates. What were the poor parkies going to do? Contact Interpol? Ring up the Belgian police and ask them to track down my father's squash partner Sue? Ha, I snapped my finger at the parking tickets. I let them pile in drifts against the



windscreen until the fines just disintegrated in the rain."

Eventually, our, ahem, hero finds his car clamped, forcing him into another polemic: "I felt a sudden constriction in the throat: a spasm of rage and amazement. How could they do this? By what right could the state take away my freedom of movement? Except that it wasn't the state that had clamped my car, but a hireling of the state, a ruthless cowboy."

It may seem strange today to find Johnson espousing the merits of Belgium and freedom of movement, but his anger against motoring regulations is a cause he returns to regularly. The following passage from his book could have been written by Cummings himself: "Our masters have decided to control our cars, and our lives, in ever more detail. They want to control how we drive and in what condition. They want to regulate what we do in our cars, where we park our cars, and now they want to tell us where we can drive, installing onboard computers to check up on us. We have got to the stage where you can be imprisoned for eating a sandwich at the wheel, for heaven's sake."

We can see more than a hint of the defence Cummings has been making his minions (ie Conservative ministers) offer on his behalf in the following passage too: "If I believe what I read in the papers – and of course I do – the boys in blue have decided that they have a new mission in life, which is to persecute and fine the middle class motorist."

The only difference between 1999 Boris is 2020 Boris is a new title and a lot more children, for perhaps the creepiest parts of *Life in the Fast Lane* are the many, many times that

MOTORMOUTH: Boris Johnson's early foray into writing helps reveal a great deal about his attitude to current events. Below Johnson's *Life in the Fast Lane* (1999)

Photos: Getty Images

he compares his car to a young woman, and on one occasion even the sat nav: "Come on baby, I say tersely to the girl, speak to me for heaven's sake. You know how it is when you're relying on some chick to map-read and they go all silent and sulky? We are coming down New North Road and some key decisions are in prospect. I'm not getting the help I need so I give Carol a poke with my index finger, because that's the kind of relationship we have."

When not lusting over his car, Boris lusts over the women he sees from his car, or in other cars, even, believe it or not, if they appear to be of the lower class sort: "She was blonde. She was beautiful. She was driving some poxy little Citroen or Peugeot thing with enormous speed and confidence. And she had just overtaken me on the A24 on the way to Dorking. And let me tell you, I wasn't having it."

On other times, Johnson, like Cummings on his way to the opticians, has trouble keeping his eyes on the road ahead: "The girl turns to wave behind us, the sun glinting on her chic little pink sunglasses, and her chest is in my face and oooooof... Have you ever been in this sort of position? How can you tell how a girl will react? Shock would be all right: a spot of gasping, nun-like shock. I could live with that."

Life in the Fast Lane is a motoring book that Donald Trump would enjoy reading, if only it had more pictures, and he would surely love our protagonist's championing of all things American. As we've come to expect from Johnson the motoring journalist his wording is outrageously offensive: "I am a fervent pro-American. You say Big Mac is a culinary disaster, I say yum-scrum. You say Disney is an abomination,

destroying old European fairy stories, rotting our children's minds. I say, I love you, Pocahontas, baby, and you too, *Lion King*. Come over here and rape our culture, you cute little Mickey Mouse, go right ahead, be my guest. I share the American dream, the get-up-and-go, Route 66, drive-by shootings, Have a Nice Day. You can keep your English breakfast, give me a pile of hamburgers with bacon and maple syrup followed by a flash-fried frazzfurter, washed down with lashings of root beer. I even quite like the look of Britney Spears. Yup, maybe it's because one of my great-grandparents was American, but there are scarcely any questions of taste or politics on which I will not defend America."

If this book has one saving grace (which it doesn't), it's that Johnson 'treats' us to only one of his poems. "*Lines Written From A Morgan Aero 8* possesses surely the worst closing stanza since William McGonagall laid down his pen in 1902:

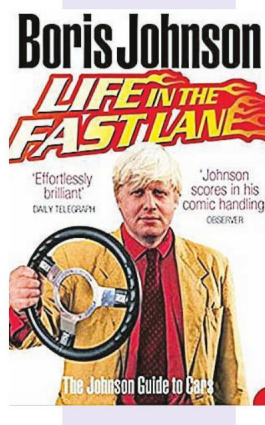
Now the leathery bucket is empty and bare

So I offer the seat to a girl with dark hair;

And the engine returns to its anapaest hum:

Titty tum titty tum titty tum titty tum.

The author is a man not for turning, except perhaps in a one-way street. Boris Johnson and Dominic Cummings are like two peas in a pod, they have drained their tanks of humility and filled up with privilege instead. *Life in the Fast Lane* does, however, contain one startling moment of truth, which Cummings has served to highlight with his recent actions: "Cars make two-faced monsters of us all, and as the number of cars continues to rise, our hypocrisy will grow."



EXPERTISE

HOW INDY PARTIES CAME TO EMBRACE EUROPE



The nationalist parties of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are not only united by their support for the EU, but also their long history of Euroscepticism. **SEAN MELEADY** explains how all three have come to change their minds on Brussels



Once dismissed as the “Nats” by BBC pundits on election nights or the “odds and sods” by Labour whips trying to prop up the Callaghan minority government during the late the 1970s, nationalist parties in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have long been derided. However the Scottish National Party, Plaid Cymru and Sinn Féin are all now playing an increasingly important role in British politics.

In Scotland, the SNP have been in government since 2007 and achieved impressive results in recent general

elections. Plaid Cymru are the second largest opposition party in the National Assembly for Wales with current opinion polls suggesting they may have a role in a coalition with Labour in Cardiff following the Welsh elections next year. Sinn Féin not only emerged with the largest number of first preference votes in the Irish general election but hold four ministerial positions in the Northern Ireland Executive. They also hold seven of the region’s 18 Westminster seats, and thanks to recent SDLP gains, the majority of MPs from Northern Ireland are now from Irish nationalist parties.

EUROPEAN CONVERSION: Saltires and European Union flags flutter in the breeze during a protest by anti-Brexit activists in Edinburgh, on January 31, 2020

Photo: Getty Images

Although all three parties have many differences, all campaigned for Remain in the 2016 EU referendum and have been highly critical of the UK’s departure from the EU. Yet it is not just their support for the European project that unites these nationalist parties – conversely, all three also share a deep history of Euroscepticism, that, in many senses, runs deeper than their more-recently found Euro-enthusiasm.

Indeed, the last time before 2016 that the UK voted in a plebiscite on the issue of Europe, in 1975, the SNP, Plaid and Sinn Féin also found themselves on the same side – backing British withdrawal from the then European Economic Community.

So what brought about this collective *volte face* over the intervening four decades? And which forces that caused it were common to all parties, and which were distinct to each case?

In truth, for the SNP, at least, the change from opposition in 1975 to support in 2016 was not exactly a *volte face*, rather a return to its roots.

It was founded in the 1930s, and in the

period after the Second World War was rather a moderate, centrist party. Inspired by the idealism and romanticism of historic links which had bonded Scotland to the continent, the SNP supported the embryonic European movement, arguing that Europe could offer Scotland a more beneficial partnership than the UK.

However, by the early 1960s the party was losing interest in Europe, as it became clear that Scottish independence was a distant prospect and that the then EEC had no great interest in Scotland.

At the same time, the party’s politics were beginning to reflect an ideological change among its members as, following an influx of ex-Labour supporters and trade unionists, the SNP began to shift to the left.

One consequence was a far more Eurosceptic attitude than the idealism of the previous decade. This new policy was entirely in line with left-wing thinking of the 1960s, including on the Labour left,

AGENDA

From page 23

which saw the European project as a bosses and bankers club, embedding capitalism across the continent. It was this thinking that still held sway in Scottish nationalism as the 1975 referendum loomed.

Many grassroots supporters argued that the EEC was a bureaucratic and undemocratic entity that would relegate Scotland to “the province of a province”.

There were warnings from the SNP about “Scotland’s oil” which they warned could be seized by Brussels. Or at the very least, the party argued, EEC competition rules would prevent Scots using their economic resources in the way they wanted.

However, the 1970s was a decade of great internal strife for the SNP and there was not total agreement in the party on the European issue. Almost half of the party’s 11 MPs favoured staying in the EEC. In the end, the party found itself on the losing side.

Only Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles voted ‘no’ in 1975, likely due to concerns regarding the fishing industry.

Overall, it was the English who were most enthusiastic for the EEC (68.7% ‘yes’), followed by the Welsh (64.8%). The Scots (58.4%) and Northern Irish (52.1%) were significantly less keen.

Yet with the matter seemingly settled for generations, the focus of Scottish nationalist politics moved to issues like devolution (a 1979 referendum on which resulted in a majority in favour, but below the turnout threshold set by the Labour government).

Europe remained in the background though, and on this subject the SNP began a gradual reversion to its earlier ‘pro’ position.

Ironically it was two men – then leader Gordon Wilson and Jim Sillars – who both voted Leave in 2016 who were responsible for this shift in policy.

In an attempt to end factional warfare Wilson, who led the party from 1979 to 1990, argued that once independence was won Scots would get a say on EEC membership with the SNP campaigning to stay in.

This policy was also sold on the basis that Europe would fork out the start-up costs for independence, therefore negating any negative economic effects. Sillars – a former Labour MP and prominent member of the SNP’s left-wing faction, the 79 Group – similarly argued for ‘independence within Europe’ a policy that was formally adopted in 1989.

While nationalists were once again keen to emphasise historical Scottish links with the continent – most famously the ‘auld alliance’ with France – the new policy was more immediately influenced by the success of Thatcherism and feelings of English dominance.

The threat of an overbearing EEC had driven the SNP towards Euroscepticism in the 1970s. The reality of an overbearing Conservative government in the 1980s was driving them the other way. Scottish nationalists’ ire had transferred from Brussels to Westminster. It has stayed there ever since.



Plaid Cymru’s European journey follows a similar path. The party was founded in the 1920s by a European enthusiast Saunders Lewis who argued

THAT WAS THEN:
1 Unlikely allies Jim Sillars (Labour), left, Margo MacDonald (SNP) and Teddy Taylor (Conservative) during an anti-Common Market rally in Glasgow, 1975

Photo: Getty Images



that Wales had been one of the ‘founders of European civilisation’ and therefore independence within a continental context was desirable. That said, there was a distinct lack of interest in the subject throughout the 1950s and 1960s, as the party matured.

That changed when the Macmillan government’s application to join the EEC and the election of the first Plaid MP Gwnfor Evans in 1966 rather focused the minds of Welsh nationalists. As in Scotland, earlier, idealistic notions had run up against more hard-headed concerns about European integration.

Plaid indicated that while it wasn’t opposed in principle to a European community of nations it felt that the EEC as it had developed up to that point would be disastrous for Welsh economic and political interests.

These sentiments were reflected in the party’s role in the 1975 referendum, when it had the slogan: “Europe YES, EEC NO.”

This opposition was based on three, specific strands. The first was the concern over the lack of representation

for Wales within the centralised European institutions.

The second was economic: since its earliest days, the party had reflected strong, left-leaning tendencies based upon principles of decentralisation and cooperation. Plaid leadership in the mid-1970s was also dominated by left-wingers who – as in the SNP and parts of the Labour party – disliked the economically liberal deregulatory policies of the EEC.

And, thirdly, Plaid were also concerned about the development of a common European foreign and defence policy to include support for nuclear weapons. This was not something that the party, with strong pacifist tendencies, could accept.

However, like the SNP, Plaid was not completely united on the issue and a small group of activists campaigned for a ‘yes’ vote, among them Saunders Lewis and future leader Dafydd Wigley.

As we have seen from the 1975 results, Plaid’s Eurosceptic position suffered a heavy defeat. This was followed, in 1979, by a referendum where 79.4% of Welsh voters rejected devolution.

Shortly afterwards, the Conservatives under Margaret Thatcher won the general election and devolution disappeared from the political agenda.

Following these setbacks there was factional warfare in Plaid between the more Eurosceptic left-wing activists centred around the ‘national left’ group and party traditionalists. Those on the left argued that traditional Welsh nationalism, based on cultural and romantic notions, had failed to make progress.

However changes were happening. Plaid unexpectedly polled 11.7% of the Welsh vote in the 1979 European parliamentary elections. There was also further momentum towards a more pro-EEC position with the election of Europhile Wigley as leader in 1981.

Europe was centre stage at the 1983 annual conference where a motion was put forward to reaffirm Plaid’s Eurosceptic position of ‘yes’ to Europe but ‘no’ to the EEC. The result was that outright opposition to the EEC was toned down, and this was reflected in the manifesto for the 1984 European election,

AGENDA



2 STRIKING A POSITION: Sinn Féin leader Mary Lou McDonald emulates the pose of the Edward Carson statue as she and Sinn Féin Vice President Michelle O'Neill join an anti-Brexit protest in Belfast

3 Graffiti pleading for Scottish Home Rule on a bridge along the Edinburgh to Glasgow road in 1939

Photos: Getty Images



where the party again achieved positive results.

The election was another lesson for Plaid's left-leaning activists, who were coming to realise they were having little impact on British and Welsh politics. This was a failure they had in common with the left more generally, which was failing to offer a coherent alternative to Thatcherism. There was also a loss of faith in state socialist based solutions and the ability to effectively oppose the Conservatives following the defeat of the 1984/85 miner's strike.

Against this backdrop, Plaid's increasingly pro-European stance – and its vindication at the ballot box – reduced factional infighting. Moderate and traditionalists in the party had long argued that a completely independent Wales would be impractical and unpopular. European offered a solution, then, providing the prospect of a more realistic framework within which independence could be achieved.

This new strategy appealed to both moderates and radicals as it proposed that Wales should first gain

independence within the EEC before participating in a federal Europe. There was also an attempt to create a progressive Welsh nationalism based around the concepts of equality, sustainability and democracy within a 'Europe of the Regions', the concept of pan-national, inter-regional development and co-operation spanning the continent.

In 1988 the party conference supported the Single European Act, the agreement that provided the path for greater integration, and the position of independence within Europe was adopted. Plaid's conversion from Eurosceptics to Euro-enthusiasts was complete. The party went in to the 1989 European elections using a slogan that was rather more ebullient than the equivocating "Europe YES, EEC NO". Now, it promised: "A voice for Wales in Europe".

★★★★★★★★★★★★

Sinn Féin's Euroscepticism has deeper roots than both the SNP's and Plaid's, and

it remains closer to the surface. Just months before the 2016 referendum Gerry Adams was talking about the "democratic deficit" of the EU while then MEP Liadh Ní Riada was among those arguing that the economic and fiscal policies of the EU had had catastrophic effects on the lives of many of its citizens. Such comments reflected not only frustrations about Ireland's treatment at Brussels' hands in the wake of the financial crash of 2008, but also Sinn Féin's historic scepticism when it comes to Europe.

The party's roots go back to 1905 but it was established in its current form following a split in 1970 over the question of whether to support the IRA's use of force. Whereas the 'Official' wing – later renamed the Workers' Party – emphasised political and parliamentary tactics and rejected violence after 1972, the 'Provisional' wing, or 'Provos', believed that violence was justified. This division was also reflected in IRA units, which were divided into 'Provo' and 'Official' sections. And Sinn Féin, under Ruairí Ó Brádaigh, president from 1970

until 1983, began its association with the Provisional IRA, which continued under Gerry Adams, who took over in 1983.

Sinn Féin and the PIRA itself were as unequivocal about the then EEC as they were about a united Ireland. In *The Green Book* (the training manual issued to all IRA 'volunteers') it argued that the government of the Republic of Ireland had given up the pretence of developing an independent economy. The Provos argued that joining the EEC was the "logical outcome" of this process.

In 1972, when the Republic held a referendum on amending its constitution to allow it to join the EEC, Sinn Féin were strongly opposed, on the grounds of anti-imperialism, compromised sovereignty and concerns over Irish neutrality, which the party feared would be eroded, as the country became more aligned with Nato. In the end, the Irish voted by 83% in favour of the constitutional changes.

Three years later, in Northern Ireland, there was rare agreement across the sectarian political divide in the 1975 EEC referendum, with all the main political parties with the exception of the moderate nationalist Social Democratic Labour Party (SDLP) supporting withdrawal.

In Ireland, the actual act of joining the EEC did not precipitate the same change of attitude seen in Scottish and Welsh nationalism.

In the 1989 European elections – by which time the SNP and Plaid had shed much of their earlier scepticism – Sinn Féin was still campaigning against Brussels. Its slogan was "EEC means jobs out imports in", with the party arguing that membership had led to increases in unemployment and emigration, and maintaining its call for Irish withdrawal.

What transformed Sinn Féin's position on Europe were the events of the 1990s and the start of the peace process in Northern Ireland. The party's engagement in that process, and the transformation it created, meant its earlier Euroscepticism had to adapt.

Motivated by the need to be seen as a more respectable party and to appeal to voters in the Europhile Republic, Sinn Féin gradually moved to a position of 'critical engagement' rather than opposition. This shift was reflected in the slogan used in the 1999 European elections – "Peace and Independence in Europe".

In 2003, Sinn Féin dropped its opposition to the Euro, which it had previously opposed on sovereignty grounds, and concern that with the Republic inside the Eurozone and Northern Ireland outside, economic differences between the two parts of Ireland would be exacerbated. Under their new policy, the UK, and by extension Northern Ireland, should also join the euro. The following year, Sinn Féin's first MEPs were elected, among them, current president Mary Lou McDonald, who earlier this year led the party to first place in first preference votes in the Irish election.

In many ways, McDonald represents the shift that the party has undergone, from its role as the political wing of the PIRA to a more mainstream affair, and to one at odds with Europe, to one that is broadly supportive. The two changes are not unconnected, of course. Ireland has a largely pro-EU political climate, as a

EXPERTISE

From page 25

result of the perceived benefits the EU has brought, such as structural fund assistance and the bloc's support for the peace process.

However Sinn Féin's Euroscepticism hasn't disappeared completely. The party campaigned against the Nice Treaty in 2001 and the Lisbon Treaty in 2008, both of which were initially rejected by the Irish electorate in referendums. Yet the strength of the earlier Euroscepticism has certainly weakened. During the Eurozone crisis Sinn Féin aligned itself with 'soft' Eurosceptic parties across the EU who argued for reform rather than withdrawal, such as Syriza in Greece.



This slightly cooler attitude towards Brussels than that now expressed by the SNP and Plaid perhaps reflects their different history, and the absence of a pan-European idealism in Sinn Féin's complex past.

What all three parties have found, though, is that Euro-enthusiasm breeds Euro-enthusiasm. As the three have turned increasingly towards Europe – in Scotland and Wales, catalysed by the Tory landslides of 1979, 1983 and 1987 which left them marginalised from Westminster; in Northern Ireland, by the peace process, which transformed Ireland's political landscape – they have not only raised their profiles, but also increased enthusiasm for the EU, becoming more Europhile parties in the process.

This was particularly accentuated when the UK switched from holding European elections under first-past-the-post to proportional representation in 1999. This allowed Plaid MEPs to be elected in 1999, with Sinn Féin making the breakthrough in Northern Ireland in 2004. Although the SNP had a few candidates, including former Hamilton MP Winnie Ewing, elected under FPTP they had consistent representation from 1999, and in the 2019 European elections were the highest polling party in every council area in mainland Scotland.

In the European parliament, the SNP and Plaid allied themselves with the Greens/European Free Alliance group, which promotes minority politics and regionalism, along with environmentalism. Catalan nationalists, who the SNP have expressed support for, are also part of this group.

Sinn Féin allied itself with the European United Left/Nordic Green Left, comprising socialist and communist parties such as the Belgian Workers Party, Syriza, Podemos, Czech and Portuguese Communist Parties, Unbowed France and The Left from Germany.

The transnational links that the SNP, Plaid and Sinn Féin have been able to develop in Brussels has helped them to promote themselves as culturally and economically liberal, modern, multicultural, internationalist and progressive.

All three nationalist parties have also seen EU investment in their communities, which has arguably played a role in reducing Eurosceptic sentiment there. For example, Scotland benefited from the European Social Fund, which is focused on skills and jobs, as well as the European Regional Development Fund, which redresses regional imbalances.

In Wales, there have been EU-funded



projects to promote the Welsh language and the development of Swansea University's Bay Campus, for instance. In Northern Ireland, the EU has contributed to peace and reconciliation projects in order to overcome conflict and sectarian divisions. By embracing European integration, albeit cautiously at first, the three parties triggered a process by which their own involvement in that integration became more entwined.

However it isn't just the nationalist parties that have changed, but the nature of the European project itself. At the time of the 1975 EEC referendum there were only nine members, all in western Europe. All, apart from the Republic of Ireland, were also in Nato, and the free market orientation of the community meant that all those who considered it a bankers' club back then might have had a bit of a point. But it has been transformed since.

The former dictatorships of Greece, Spain and Portugal joined in the 1980s. Then, later, after Austria and Finland, came the former communist states of east and central Europe. To its enthusiasts this shows how the EU can be a vehicle to promote a diversity of European cultures, including minority ones. The promotion of linguistic diversity in the European parliament and throughout the Union is a particularly visible expression of this. So while Scottish, Welsh and Irish nationalists feel ignored by London, they feel respected by Brussels, as part of a community of European cultures.

CHANGING APPROACHES:
1 Scottish Nationalist politician Margo MacDonald celebrates her victory with Plaid Cymru Welsh Nationalists, 1973

2 Sinn Féin president Gerry Adams holds a press conference during a visit to Chicago, 1995

Photos: Getty Images



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MATT WITHERS talks to Mandu Reid, leader of the Women's Equality Party, about the inequities highlighted by the pandemic, working in Boris Johnson's City Hall and an unlikely political inspiration



For reasons that researchers are still investigating, Covid-19 appears to be taking its heaviest clinical toll on men. In many other ways, though, it is clear that it is women being disproportionately hit hardest by the pandemic.

Whether it be the gender pay gap, the impact of schools closing or domestic abuse, data suggests the measures taken to tackle the virus have been particularly harmful to women. So is this the moment for the Women's Equality Party?

The leader of the five-year-old party, Mandu Reid, is on the phone to me from a park in Lewisham, south London. The 39-year-old, the permanent leader since January, was born in Malawi to a Malawian mother and English father. She is therefore, I venture, one of those citizens of nowhere that Theresa May warned us about.

"Exactly, yeah," she says. "She did warn the British people about my kind."

Reid predominantly grew up in Swaziland "in the twilight years of the apartheid regime in South Africa, which was just next door and so – I probably don't need to spell it out – for us, the very existence of our family was politically significant if you think about it."

"Because I was a mixed-race child with a white father and a black mother in a culture that was fading out – of course it was, it was on its last legs – but it was socially and legally prohibited for the races to mix."

"So for me growing up in that environment and attending an international secondary school, I guess I had a very heightened awareness from the beginning of life of injustice and prejudice."

Moving to the UK to attend sixth form, she went on to study at the LSE before going on to a career in project and programme management at the Treasury, Department for Culture, Media and Sport and London's City Hall under three different mayors (Boris Johnson, she says in what is unlikely to be the revelation of the interview, "didn't poke around in the detail hardly at all").

What might be more of a surprise is that she only came to feminism in her 20s, her focus previously being on the racial inequality she saw "in vivid technicolour".

"It wasn't as obvious to me that inequality between men and women was such a kind of toxic prevailing problem," she says.

"And I think it was more a gradual thing – I didn't have a big bang moment, but I just started as a young woman to see how I had to navigate things in the world that young men my age didn't."

"Just really simple things. Feeling safe

BIG MOMENT FOR A NEW MOVEMENT



at night in a city like London, which isn't the most dangerous place in the world, but for me I just compared the experience of moving through the world to my male peers and I just thought 'hang on a minute, there's, like, something awry here'. And that just caused... it wasn't like a lightbulb moment, but I'm a very kind of like, curious, inquisitive person and it created almost a line of enquiry, right?"

After reading "a few classic feminist texts", and seeing the experiences she'd had being echoed, "it really just burgeoned from there", she says.

But it was a particular difficult time in Reid's life – what she calls a "stitch-up moment" – which would draw her to the Women's Equality Party, when she became pregnant at the age of 33.

"I had to make a decision about what to do," she says.

"And the man was significantly younger than me, his career was less kind of advanced and promising than me yet neither of us could imagine a situation where I wasn't going to be the sole caregiver of that child."

"And that really struck home when I

subsequently discovered the Women's Equality Party policies. Because I ended up having an abortion. I didn't feel I could honour the plans and ambitions I had for my life and be a single parent and stay sane and stay afloat financially."

"So when I understood the Women's Equality Party policies of properly shared parental leave between both parents, and free universal childcare from the age of parental leave to age five, it honestly would have enabled me to make a different choice."

"I was already a feminist at that point but it solidified me, I suppose, that experience, that realisation of how politics isn't anywhere near ambitious enough when it comes to trying to make equality between men and women a reality."

The traditional route for a liberal, politically engaged young woman might seem to have been to join, say, the Labour Party and make the arguments for that policy agenda from within, I say. Actually, Reid says, she attempted that but just grew frustrated.

"I joined the Labour Party in 2010 and I tried to get involved locally but I found it very unsatisfactory."

UNLIKELY INSPIRATION: Mandu Reid's Women's Equality Party remains firmly anti-Brexit – but the party's leader wants to emulate Nigel Farage's ability to create a groundswell of support for a cause
Photo: George Torode

"I found the levels of ambition for the things I believed in insufficient. It always felt like inequality between men and women was a footnote."

"It always felt like their economic policies kind of gave a cursory nod to those issues that were nowhere near radical enough and women were gonna have to wait a hundred f***ing years if we were gonna go at the pace of the party that positioned itself as fighting for us in that regard."

(Under a policy Reid calls "political polyamory" the Women's Equality Party allows members to also be in another political party. "We'll welcome you with open arms. Just don't tell the Labour Party, they'll chuck you out.")

Eventually she became acting leader last year when her predecessor, Sophie Walker, stepped down. She was due to run for leader but her opponent pulled out, making her permanent leader in January. The party now has 30,000 members across 70 branches with the largest concentrations in London, Leeds and Manchester.

Last year I attended the launch of its European election campaign in Hackney,

EXPERTISE



east London. It was, I venture, very Hackney in the make-up of its attendees, more Portlandia than, say, Portsmouth. I wonder if that was a fair representation of the membership.

"I don't think it's quite that simple," says Reid.

"We're only five years old. People who came on board in the very early days – I think it probably is fair to suggest they were from, I guess, a narrower demographic, but what's happened over time is that we've come to the attention of a much broader constituency of mainly women – although since I've been leader more men have joined.

"It's definitely changing. But I think it's a completely fair assessment that in the early days, and perhaps because, you know, [the party's co-founders] Catherine Mayer, Sandi Toksvig and Sophie Walker, the previous leader, were the visible figureheads, it attracted people who had comparable backgrounds. I'm very different from all of them, I have very different networks, I have a completely different make-up."

What is telling now is that some of the issues which the Women's Equality Party

has campaigned on since its inception, says Reid, are coming into sharper focus as the coronavirus crisis highlights chronic deficiencies in the state.

"And the other thing that's happened is the public appetite for an understanding of how important these issues are has gone through the roof in the space of just a couple of months," she says.

"And so whereas it was seen as like a zany thing to do to formulate a manifesto around care and the contribution care makes to the economy – now people are looking at that and seeing how, on so many levels, it makes sense.

"If we had an economy that recognised both paid care work and unpaid care work in a more meaningful way we would have had a more resilient economy that could have coped better with the catastrophic impact of a crisis like this.

"You know how people talk about how the Covid crisis is a great leveller? Well, I talk about it as the great revealer. It reveals all these things that we have been talking about for so long, and in some cases it's aggravated, you know, inequalities and dysfunctions in our society."

It is also horrific to think of what may have been going on behind closed doors during lockdown. The domestic violence charity Refuge has reported that visits to its website have increased 10-fold since the nation was confined to home.

"It's one of the most prevalent crimes in the country," says Reid. "You're talking about 2.4 million victims every single year, the vast majority of them women.

"You know, do a comparison between that and Covid deaths. That is an epidemic in its own right. And yet, until Covid struck, were there any calls for the equivalent of PPE for that epidemic? Were there any calls for the equivalent of a vaccination for the epidemic of domestic violence? No.

"In fact the opposite was happening: services were being slashed and burned and stripped back by a government who at every turn removed funding from some of the most vulnerable people in our community."

Reid had been due to be the party's candidate for London mayor this year in a poll postponed until 2021. While she concedes she was an "outside bet", they were genuinely hopeful of getting their first seat on the London Assembly.

And intriguingly, while the Women's Equality Party was, and remains, firmly anti-Brexit, Reid draws an inspiration from the unlikely of figures – Nigel Farage.

"His political capital went from zero to through the roof because he managed to position himself as the spokesman for these big swathes of the British voting public who felt like they hadn't been and weren't being listened to," she says.

"And so the puzzle for me is how do we highlight what's going on for women and also the way that's negatively affecting men as well? How do we create that groundswell of support that gives extra political capital to the ideas that we're trying to promote and what our party's trying to achieve?"

"The way Nigel Farage and UKIP did that provides some inspiration. And I only mean inspiration for the mechanics, because I would argue that his cause was nefarious whereas ours is noble. So my work is very much around using the tactics that served him and UKIP so well towards what we're trying to achieve."

Using Farage for good? That would be genuinely revolutionary.

PANDEMIC REVERSES EQUALITY PROGRESS

MARY HONEYBALL on the many ways women are suffering from the measures used to tackle the virus



On June 5, Dani Wallace's *The Big Festoon* is hitting a computer screen near you. A survivor of domestic violence and homelessness, Dani was a single parent for many years. *The Big Festoon* is a 12-hour online event involving 12 celebrities and 12 global entrepreneurs coming together live in lockdown via an online meeting of minds to inspire, entertain, educate and fundraise for domestic violence charities Women's Aid and Galop. Dani is interviewing the celebrities and entrepreneurs, aiming to raise our spirits while coping with the coronavirus restrictions.

Her efforts are sorely needed and her avowedly happy event is set to cheer us up. We are urged to link arms, virtually of course, to create a buzz to raise money and change lives. Funding to combat domestic abuse is needed now more than ever. Lockdowns across the world have led to a serious increase in domestic violence. At the end of April, none other than former prime minister Theresa May urged the government to consider the impact of the UK's lockdown on domestic abuse as it planned the exit strategy. She pointed out that there had been a surge in domestic violence in the weeks following the lockdown. Killings had risen, and the number of calls to the National Domestic Abuse helpline run by Refuge had also increased. At the beginning of this month the World Health Organisation's European Director told a press briefing that the number of women making emergency calls across the continent had risen by 60% in April compared with the same month last year.

It took a woman former prime minister to speak out about the appalling rise in domestic abuse as families have been kept at home. Thankfully the Domestic Abuse Bill originally proposed while May was in office has now been introduced into the House of Commons, though it will more than likely be too late for those victims (almost all of whom are women) hit by the rise in violence following the measures to deal with the coronavirus pandemic. While they may be supporting legislation in the UK, the current government have steadfastly refused to ratify the Istanbul Convention, the international human rights treaty promoted by the Council of Europe to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic abuse.

Women are losing out all round as the government seeks to contain the pandemic. A recent report by the Institute for Fiscal Studies and

University College London found where both parents were working, mothers were only able to do one hour of uninterrupted work for every three hours done by fathers. Mothers were also doing more childcare and housework than fathers who had the same work arrangements. Tellingly, the research showed that the only sets of households where mothers and fathers shared childcare and housework equally were those in which both parents had been working but the father had stopped working for pay while the mother was still in paid work.

An increasing body of evidence shows that women are bearing the emotional brunt of the coronavirus pandemic in Britain. According to a survey for the Fawcett Society conducted by Ipsos Mori, women are taking on greater levels of stress and anxiety during the country's lockdown. Women are more likely to have experienced disruption to work and finances with 33% saying their workplaces had closed while only 25% of men had suffered the same fate.

Women are suffering more than men at every level. Gender equality in the UK, across Europe, in the United States and doubtless elsewhere is receding in terms of violence and abuse against women, women's position in the workplace and home and in women's economic standing. The progress towards equality which many thought was inevitable and would continue come what may is inherently fragile. Progress may have been made while times were good. Now that the world has been hit by an aggressive virus with no cure as yet, we are going backwards.

The way in which gender equality has been halted and even reversed is a huge lesson for everyone who thinks women and men should be treated equally. Women deserve the same opportunities as men. They should be paid on an equal basis. Childcare and other provision should be in place to allow women to achieve their potential. Equality is unfortunately not a given in Britain or most other countries in 2020. Vigilance is required.

Women must not be consigned back to the days when they stayed at home with very little scope to do anything else. Everyone deserves a chance and a choice. The EU, with its Gender Equality Institute and the European parliament Women's Rights Committee, was until the end of last year the one place where Britain could develop policy on gender equality. The country now has to rely on a male-dominated government with very little idea about gender equality, let alone any political will to ensure the position of women prior to the pandemic is maintained, if not improved, when the country returns to something like normality.

■ Mary Honeyball was an MEP from 2000-2019 and vice-chair of the European parliament Women's Rights Committee

■ To find out more about The Big Festoon, visit www.iamthequeenbee.co.uk/thebigfestoon

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In the week of the 80th anniversary of the Dunkirk evacuation, **TIM LUCKHURST** delves into the newspaper archives to see how this pivotal moment was reported



Modern Britons associate the Great Escape with the 1963 film of that name starring Steve McQueen, referring to, of course, a mass escape by Allied prisoners during the Second World War. But this title might more appropriately be applied to the rescue of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) from Dunkirk between May 27 and June 4, 1940.

As the UK marks the 80th anniversary of that escape, we have heard much of the author JB Priestley's first



HOW THE PRESS TURNED THE TIDE AT DUNKIRK

"postscript" for BBC Radio on Wednesday June 5.

That broadcast coined the phrase "Little Ships" and even acknowledged Priestley's own part in shaping understanding of Dunkirk. He asked listeners: "Doesn't it seem to you to have an inevitable air about it – as if we had turned a page in the history of Britain and seen a chapter headed 'Dunkirk'?"

But there was nothing inevitable about it.

Before pledging to "fight them on the beaches", Winston Churchill himself reminded the House of Commons in the same speech that "wars are not won by evacuations".

He acknowledged that the BEF had courted disaster before depicting its escape as "a miracle of deliverance". That the British public regards it as a triumph owes much to the work of British newspaper journalists and the Royal Navy press officers who briefed them.

Dunkirk was not reported in eyewitness accounts from the beaches. The few war correspondents who struggled back with the retreating armies had no means by which to communicate. Reports, such as Evelyn Montague's "The Miracle of the BEF's Return" for the *Manchester Guardian* of Saturday June 1, 1940, were penned by journalists invited to witness the Royal Navy's delivery of evacuated soldiers to the ports of south-east England. There, they were briefed with patriotic fervour and naval pride as well as facts.

The first sentence of Montague's piece gives a flavour of the mood that was inspired:

MIGHTY IN DEFEAT:

1 Children rush to greet a trainload of troops from the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), repatriated in the Dunkirk evacuation, 1940

Photo: Getty Images

2 David Low's "Very Well, Alone" cartoon for the *Evening Standard*, 1940

Photo: Contributed



"In the grey chill dawn today in a south-eastern port, war correspondents watched with incredulous joy the happening of a miracle."

The reporter – a grandson of the famous *Guardian* editor and owner C.P. Scott – did not fail to give the Royal Navy credit. Having described a waterfront hotel in which "every armchair held its sleeping soldier or sailor, huddled beneath overcoat or ground sheet", Montague turned to the scene in the port: "As the rising sun was turning the grey clouds to burnished copper the first destroyer of the day slid swiftly into the harbour, its silhouette bristling with the heads of the men who stood packed shoulder to shoulder on its decks."

Back in 1940, the *Times* did not award reporters bylines. Its report of the BEF's return on June 1 was by "Our Special Correspondent". He too witnessed the scenes in a south-eastern port (security censorship forbade more precise identification). The men, he wrote, were "weary but undaunted".

Protected by "the ceaseless patrol maintained by British warships and aeroplanes in the English Channel", men who had displayed "steadiness under a cruel test" were "pouring onto the quays".

The *Daily Mirror*'s Bernard Gray, writing in its stablemate, the *Sunday Pictorial*, gave his verdict in a column on June 2 headlined simply "The Whole Magnificent Story". "There have been many glorious episodes in the history of Britain", he opined, "but, if that great English historian Macaulay were able to select from 2,000 years the most glorious week in the annals of the British Empire, this last seven days would surely be the week he would have chosen."

Gray did not hesitate to offer comparisons:

"Never mind the defeat of the Armada. Forget even the Battle of Waterloo, the epic of Trafalgar. For this week has seen the British Empire at its mightiest – in defeat."

Standing "in the streets of an English Channel Port", G. Ward Price of the *Daily Mail* was similarly enthralled in his front page piece, "Rearguard Battles On", on June 1: "It is a picture of staggering heroism, fighting spirit and determination that never weakened in the face of overwhelming odds in men and material."

It took Hilaire Belloc, the Anglo-French author of *Cautionary Tales for Children*, to recognise in his column for the *Sunday Times* ("The Evacuation and After", June 2) that the withdrawal from Belgium and the collapse of Britain's key ally, France, constituted a "catastrophe".

In his defining examination of the

elements that comprise Britain's "received story" of 1940, *The Myth of the Blitz*, Scottish historian and poet Angus Calder noted that elements of the way the story was reported were misleading. However, Calder agreed that "Dunkirk was indeed a great escape".

I celebrate the work British newspapers did to stiffen resolve and sustain morale at this time of grave national peril. In a democracy fighting totalitarianism, newspapers must balance their obligation to hold power to account and their duty to the national cause. The newspapers surveyed here certainly colluded in the creation of myths about Dunkirk, but their readers might not have welcomed any efforts to report Dunkirk any other way.

After all, myths are not lies and this one was studded with harsh facts. In Bernard Gray's words for the *Sunday Pictorial*, Dunkirk was glorious despite the truth that: "The British Army has not won a battle. The British Army has retreated. The British Army has had to leave the Battlefield."

For me, David Low captured the prevailing mood in his famous "Very Well, Alone" cartoon for the *Evening Standard* just a few weeks later on June 18. It depicts a British soldier alone before a raging sea and gesturing with a raised fist towards the Nazi-occupied continent from which German troops were expected to arrive at any moment.

Tim Luckhurst is principal of South College, Durham University; this article also appears at theconversation.com

EXPERTISE

Mitch Benn

Comedian,
Musician,
Writer

The trouble with populism is that it's empty. It's like a slick advertisement advertising nothing except itself.

If your sole agenda is your own advancement and your sole selling point is your own fabulousness, then once that advancement has been achieved you've got nothing left to sell, and nothing to work towards except your own preservation. So that – your own preservation – becomes your new, and only, agenda.

All over social media I'm seeing people wailing "Who could possibly have foreseen that the Trump presidency would end like this?" To those people I would say: 1.) What makes you think it's "ending", and 2.) In answer to your question, everyone. Literally everyone knew that it would come to this. Everyone paying attention, in any case.

What we're seeing the United States undergo right now is like the transitional phase you see kleptocracies pass through on their way to becoming a dictatorship. We've seen this pattern repeated all over the world in the last couple of centuries.

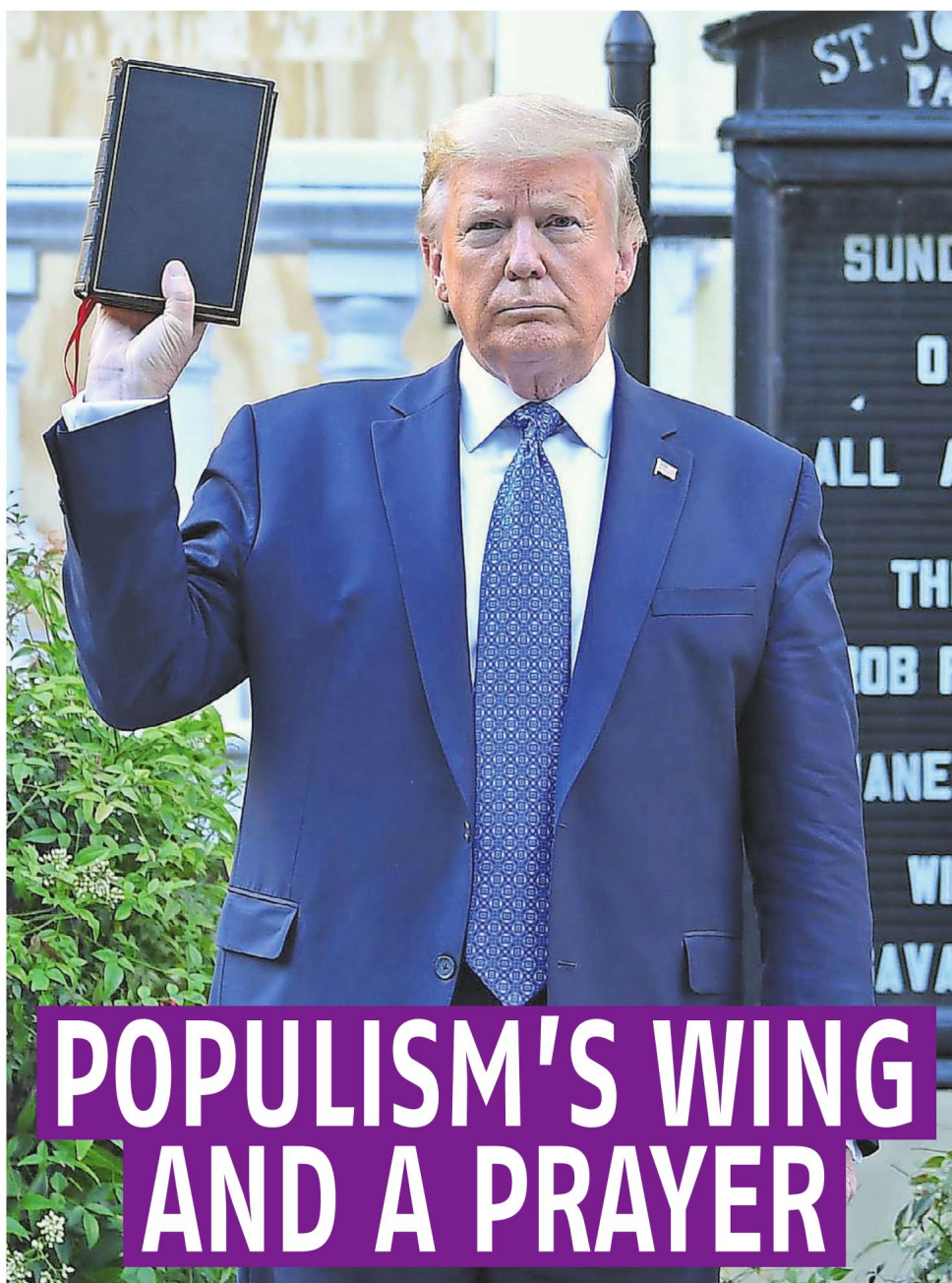
Prior to the last couple of centuries, men like Trump, having come to power through whatever means, would simply declare themselves king and sit back to rule for life. But since most countries are now republics it's become necessary for such rulers to find ways of subverting their nations' constitutions in order to make themselves *president* for life.

And it is, from their point of view anyway, absolutely necessary. By the time such a ruler has been in power for more than a couple of years, he's generally committed so many crimes against his own state and people (whether it's just helping himself to the nation's wealth or 'disappearing' his opponents and critics) that it's only his position, and the control it affords him over the police, judiciary and military that's keeping him out of jail.

Even if he grows bored of power, he can't afford to relinquish it as that power is the only thing keeping him alive. So he has to do whatever it takes to bypass democracy and keep himself in the presidential palace until it's safe to confer his title onto one of his sons (or daughter; perhaps, should his sons happen to be a couple of goofy-teethed feckless dough-brained frat boys).

Such is now the case with Donald Trump. Only the convention that one does not indict a sitting president, and the supine cravenness of the Republican senate have prevented him from being prosecuted on allegations of misdeeds committed over his three and a half years in office (and the period immediately before this).

Trump does not know much about anything but what he does know how to do is survive, and he will understand that if he leaves office next January 20, unless he's signed some sort of Nixonian immunity deal, he can expect to be pursued vigorously on all these matters by the incoming administration.



Given that he'll be 74 years old by then and is not, despite his glowing "medical reports" and proclamations of physical perfection, what you'd call a picture of health, this is a chilling prospect for the president.

So as it stands, Trump has three choices: 1.) Die in prison; 2.) Win in November; 3.) Find some way of preventing/nullifying November's election.

About 10 years ago I wrote a song called *State of Emergency* (it's on Spotify) in which I flagged up the tendency of weakened heads of state to, when faced with being voted out, precipitate a national crisis, award themselves limitless 'emergency powers' and postpone the election until... whenever.

I forget which country's Beloved Leader had just pulled this stunt at the time; I don't think I ever expected to see it happen in America.

It shouldn't surprise anyone that it's the outburst of black anger at the death of George Floyd at the hands (or rather knee) of an arresting police officer upon

SURVIVOR: Donald Trump defiantly holds a bible outside a church in Washington's Lafayette Park on June 1. The president promised swift action to end anti-racism protests following the death of George Floyd

Photo: Getty Images

which Trump has chosen to build his crisis of opportunity; this is, after all, the man who entered politics by declaring Barack Obama a Kenyan Muslim interloper and launched his campaign by calling Mexican immigrants rapists.

I'm not sure what emergency powers the US constitution allows a president to award himself but I'm sure Trump and his attorney general will try to find a way around this. After all, if Trump merely cancels the election, his (and vice president Mike Pence's) term still expires on January 20.

If no new president has been appointed by then, as it stands, the constitution would appoint the speaker of the House (ie. Trump arch-nemesis Nancy Pelosi) as acting president. A fate worse than death as far as Trump is concerned.

But take heart, Americans; at least you will, in theory, have a shot at removing Trump before the end of the year. Unless something truly unexpected happens, we're saddled with our bizarrely coiffed, lazy, mendacious, debauched, vacuous, narcissistic 'populist' until 2024.

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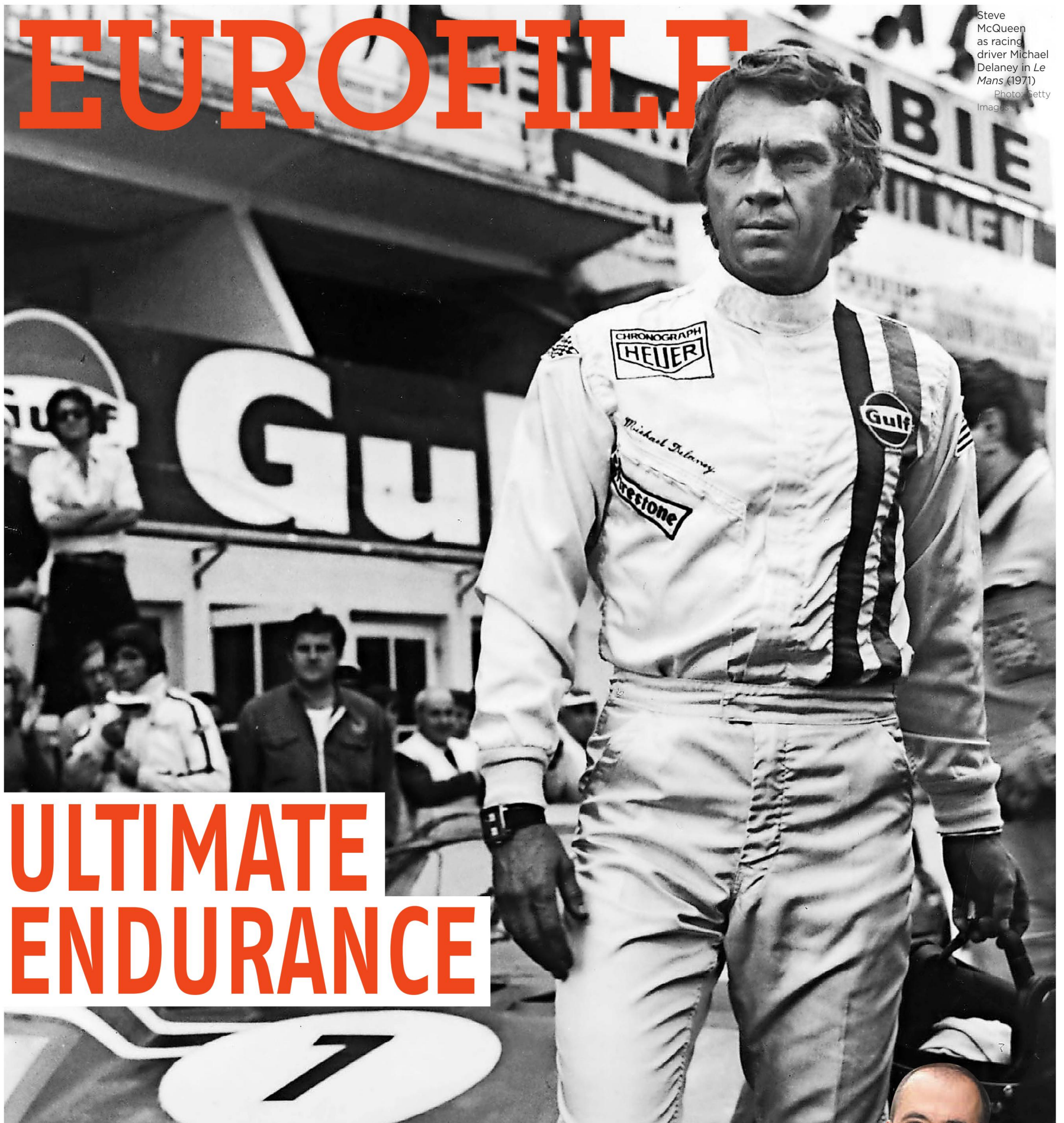
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EUROFILM

Steve McQueen as racing driver Michael Delaney in *Le Mans* (1971)
Photo: Getty Images



ULTIMATE ENDURANCE

MICK O'HARE ON THE TORTURED BACKGROUND TO *LE MANS*, THE ILL-STARRED FILM THAT HAS TURNED OUT TO BE STEVE MCQUEEN'S MOTORSPORT MASTERPIECE



EUROFILE CINEMA



Sometimes sport, despite its frequently overwrought and improbable hyperbole, invoking triumph and tragedy at every turn, throws up a genuinely heart-warming story.

Fifty years ago Hans Herrmann, veteran racing driver, former baker, journeyman racer, and all-round nice guy won the 1970 Le Mans 24-Hour race at his final attempt, 18 years after his first.

He had promised his wife he would retire after the race and with the victory garland still around his neck was true to his word. The previous year the German had agonisingly come second to the man who would eventually become a six-time winner and Le Mans legend – Belgian Jacky Ickx – in the closest ever un-staged finish in the history of the race. It was the ultimate fairytale ending.

Yet despite the upbeat spirit generated by Herrmann's popular victory, 1970 at Le Mans is remembered more for what was happening off the track, for it was the year Steve McQueen and Hollywood came to the races.

McQueen, of course, was famous for his acting, but he'd rather have been lauded for his racing. In 1970 he finished second at the Sebring 12-Hour race in Florida, often considered a warm-up for the Le Mans 24 Hours.

He proved to himself and, of substantially more importance to him, to his racing driver peers that he was their equal. It also proved to him that he was capable of making the film he had always wanted to make – the motor racing movie par excellence.

McQueen admitted he preferred the freedom of the track to the fakery of the studio and this movie was going to reflect that. It would be "authentic" – one that racing drivers and aficionados would laud in perpetuity. And he would make it around the world's most famous race, the Le Mans 24 Hours.

Every June (Covid-19 and world wars permitting) race fans converge on the Sarthe region of north-west France for the annual running of the 24-hour race. It starts on a Saturday afternoon, races non-stop through the night and finishes on Sunday – as many as 60 cars battling to be the first across the line when the chequered flag drops at the end of the most gruelling contest in the sport.

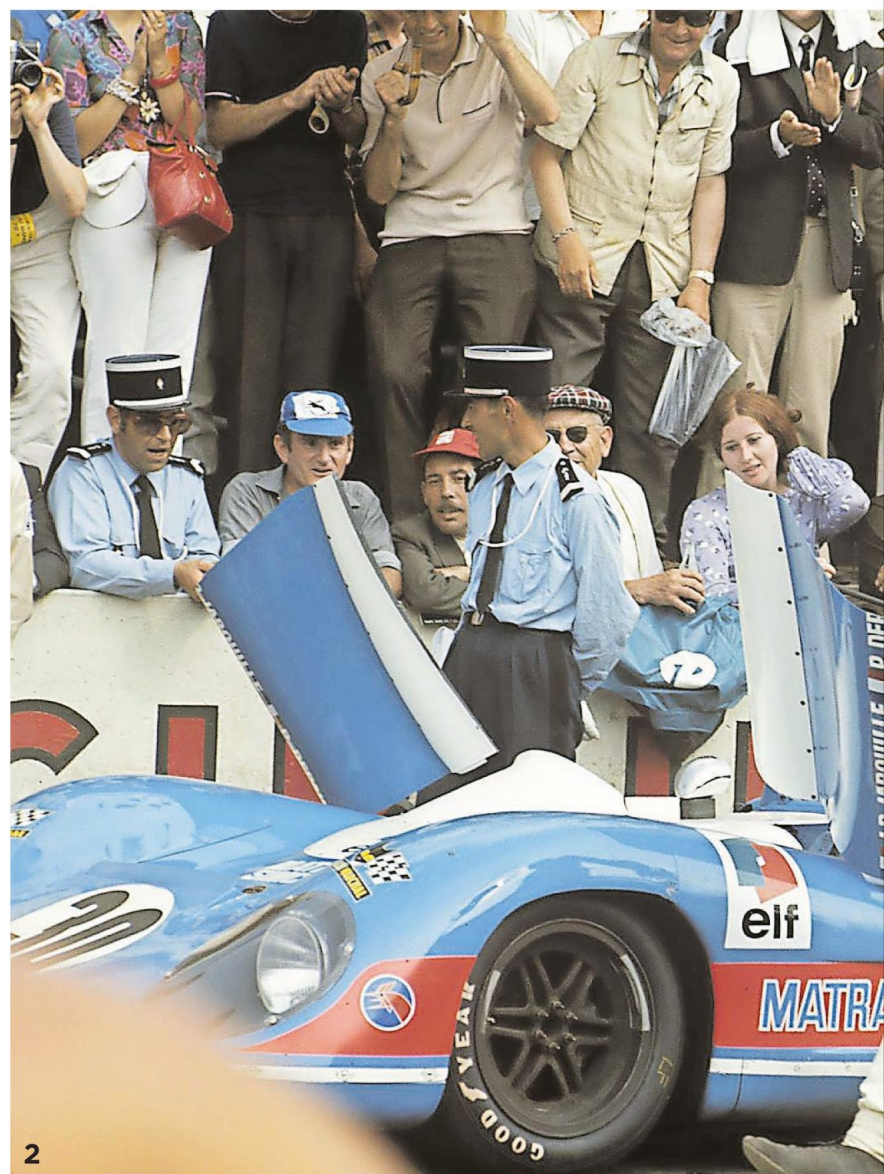
In his eponymous film McQueen wanted to capture the essence of what the drivers experienced – the challenge, the passion, the tactics, the competitive struggle, the ever-present threat of a life-changing or life-ending accident, the adrenaline, the exhaustion, and the glory or failure, the very essence of what

NEED FOR SPEED:

1 Steve's McQueen's son Chad behind the wheel of a mini Ferrari during filming of *Le Mans* (1971)

2 Steve McQueen at Le Mans 1970 for the shooting of the Hollywood star's eponymous movie

Photos: Getty Images



racing was distilled into a movie – his magnum opus.

But it turned out the problem was, he cared too much. Schedule, budget, script (many of them), directors... all went out of the window as his obsession drove him on.

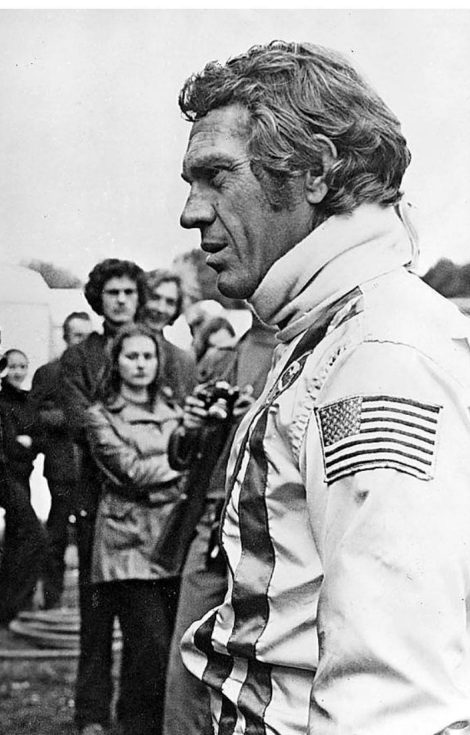
Back in 1966 John Frankenheimer had directed what had been regarded as the best motorsport film ever made. *Grand Prix* followed a fictional Formula 1 season (although real footage, alongside enacted racing, was shot for the movie throughout the 1966 season).

McQueen believed he could do better, although admitted his jealousy for the project and its star, fellow American James Garner, sometimes got the better of him.

It may be apocryphal but the story goes that at one point when he lived in an apartment above Garner's in Hollywood Hills he gave vent to his envy by urinating on Garner's pot plants on the plot below.

McQueen called Frankenheimer's movie "a prime example of a director playing with himself in public". He knew it wasn't. He knew it was a great racing film, but professional rivalry ran deep, and while *Grand Prix* was admired widely by racing fans McQueen still reckoned parts of the story seemed





improbable and some of the scenes clearly staged. He thought he could do better.

It was this obsession and an attention to detail that would nearly cause his movie to crash and burn. Certainly it destroyed his first marriage to Neile Adams. It also ruined his relationships with executive producer and former friend Bob Relyea and first director John Sturges, plus most of the people he came into contact with over his summer spent in France in 1970.

The movie was released the year after Herrmann's victory, in 1971, to what are known as "mixed reviews". What Hollywood could only see at the beginning as a sure-fire hit – McQueen, the 'King of Cool', in a fast car – had instead turned into what was described as "the most expensive documentary ever made".

Critics disliked the lack of a real storyline and regular moviegoers, expecting the kind of action hero McQueen had played in *The Magnificent Seven* and *Bullitt*, couldn't immediately grasp what motivated Michael Delaney, the more thoughtful character McQueen played in the movie.

Since then, it has been re-evaluated – most notably, but not exclusively, by motor racing fans – to become one of a



OBSESSION:

3 Steve McQueen at the 1969 Le Mans race

4 McQueen on the set of *Le Mans* (1971)

Photos: Getty Images

handful of racing movies to achieve cult status. It has taken a while though.

Part of the problem with motor racing flicks is that the plot tends to be outlandish and the racing scenes contrived.

For all its fine acting by Christian Bale and Matt Damon, last year's release *Le Mans 66* suffers from the same.

Racing lines are non-existent, drivers seem able to overtake by simply pressing the accelerator a little harder, or finding an improbable extra gear. And they have time to snarl as they pass rivals.

There's none of this in McQueen's *Le Mans*. The first lap footage – nearly all of it genuine but interspersed with additional material – is superb, but the editing is key.

At any major meeting, but especially at Le Mans, for those near the startline there is a visceral moment of anticipation immediately before the race. The hubbub of the crowd fades as the start time approaches.

Le Mans captures this with almost painful intensity. Even the heartbeats of the drivers as they gaze at the starter seem uncontrived. A thousandth of a second before the flag falls, when engines are at their peak, waiting to be unleashed by overheating clutches, the cars remain stationary.

And then, at first almost imperceptibly, they slither away amid tyre smoke and squealing engines. Within a second they are jostling for position and gone around the first corner. It's mesmerising, in equal measures beguiling and belligerent, and McQueen nailed it in fiction.

Further round the track the sense of anticipation is different. The crowd will have heard the distant roar of the start and know the cars are on their way. Then suddenly they burst into view, a cacophonous locust swarm.

This is true of any motor race, from everyday Mini Coopers to Formula 1. But the cars in *Le Mans* were the big beasts of 1970s sportscar racing – five-litre engines powering howling Porsches and grunting Ferraris, twitching and unstable with high fuel loads.

The grandstands shook as they passed. The movie shows the cars on their first lap down the long Mulsanne Straight, a 6km-long blast at full speed. They appear in the distance, as fortuitously a small bird lands on the barrier just in front of the camera. Then the cars are upon us, the bird takes flight and the might and pinnacle of automotive innovation hollers past and into the distance.

EUROFILE CINEMA



1



2

From page 35

As a movie, perhaps it is understandable that it was poorly received by general film audiences. But for race fans especially, and with the benefit of 50 years of hindsight, that opening lap – a sequence which lasts a mere three minutes 46 seconds – would have been worth the entrance fee alone.

It's impressive on DVD. On a big screen it is stunning. And there are more dramatic scenes in the wet – the spray cancelling out the view of the drivers leaving us glimpsing slithering tail lights amid an impenetrable mist, and out-of-focus headlights passing throughout the night sequences as the cars continue to circulate at up to 380 kilometres per hour. Every sound in the movie was real.

At this point – the end of the first lap – we are almost 31 minutes in and no-one has spoken. In fact no actor speaks a scripted line for the first 37 minutes.

McQueen wanted to immerse the viewer in what embodied a motor race, especially what embodied racing at Le Mans. He was a perfectionist and he feared ridicule from race fans more than from moviegoers, which is why the script suffered. The movie has fewer lines of dialogue than any other blockbuster

made before or since – the actor playing the driver who eventually wins speaks only two lines in total – but that was only one of the project's problems.

After his great successes of the 1960s, including *The Great Escape* and *The Cincinnati Kid*, McQueen decided he wanted creative control over the films he would make and set up Solar Productions with his trusted executive producer Relyea.

They signed a deal in March 1969 with Cinema Center Films to make *Le Mans*. Bob Rosen, executive in charge of production at CCF, knew it was a coup to have McQueen on board and initially allowed him pretty much free rein, aware that the actor wanted to make the “racing movie for all time. The definitive”.

McQueen hired director Sturges, with whom he had made *The Great Escape* and *The Magnificent Seven*. Filming began in June 1970, just before the race itself.

“The plan was to shoot practice, qualifying and the race to get the real stuff, then wait for everybody to go home and shoot the rest of the movie to fill in the gaps,” recalled Relyea in 2001, 12 years before his death.

Actors and real racing drivers, whom they had to remunerate, were added to the payroll, plus a whole bevy of technical support. But still there was no

MAVERICK:
1 Steve McQueen on the *Le Mans* set

2 McQueen wanted *Le Mans* to immerse moviegoers in an authentic race experience

Photos: Getty Images

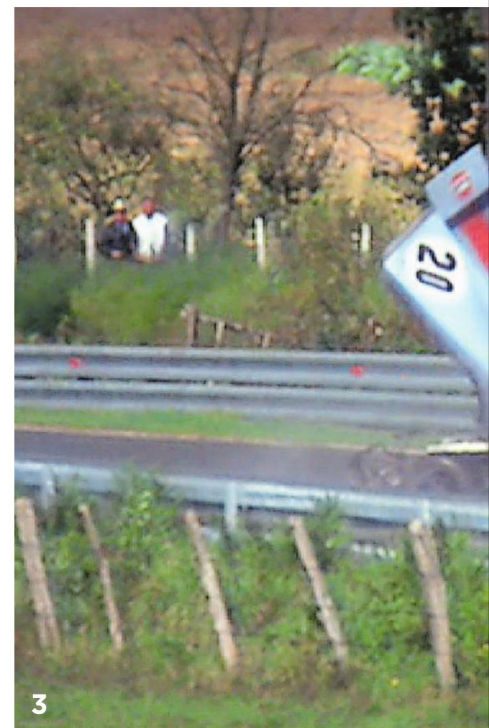
script and while it was relatively common for a movie to develop its storyline as filming progressed, McQueen simply couldn't settle on one as scriptwriters came and went.

Each was attempting to please the studio with a storyline for a movie which – as far as McQueen was concerned – wasn't meant to have one. He had no intention of using racing as a backdrop to an adventure story or a romance. To him, racing *was* the story. It was more like choreography than movie making.

Rosen said it was akin to McQueen “wanting to write the great American novel. He just couldn't get it down on paper.” His fellow actor, Siegfried Rauch, who played his on-track rival Erich Stahler, said: “It meant a lot to him. Almost everything.”

Truth is, McQueen actually wanted to race at Le Mans. He believed he'd earned the right after his Sebring success, but there was no way the studio and their jittery insurers would let that happen. It possibly clouded some of his judgment – demanding more of actors who didn't have the same knowledge he had.

In an attempt to move things along McQueen contacted Alan Trustman, the man who had scripted some of his most successful movies, *The Thomas Crown Affair* and *Bullitt*. But, according to



3

CINEMA EUROFILE



Rosen, McQueen was still contesting every line, every word, every comma.

Even Trustman left, disillusioned, giving up screenwriting for a life as a commodities trader. It got worse. McQueen was coming into conflict with Sturges as he tried to wrest direction from his control and admitted as much himself. "When something is close to you, you have a tendency to become too much of a perfectionist," he said in the documentary *Steve McQueen: Le Mans and the Man*. He was insisting that his character Michael Delaney lose the race, because that's what could happen in reality. But the perplexed director and scriptwriters didn't want to disappoint the studio who expected McQueen to win.

Sturges quit and flew back to America; he'd simply had enough. He remains uncredited on the movie. Filming was suspended and CCF, by now very edgy about the copious amounts of money that was being spent on *Le Mans*, stepped in.

McQueen was told that all he had to do was act. He was forced to sign a new contract (which he did, but wrote "in blood" beneath his name) and had a new director imposed on him, Lee Katzin, an unknown TV director from Detroit. McQueen didn't know Katzin and Katzin knew nothing about motorsport. The actor-director animosity resumed.

DRAMA:

3 The Porsche of Steve McQueen's character Michael Delaney crashes in a scene from the movie

4 McQueen on set. The star's relationships with friends and colleagues suffered as his obsession with *Le Mans* grew

5 *Le Mans* lobbycard

Photos: Getty Images

But money and directors weren't the only thing McQueen was losing – there was his marriage. Among many dalliances, McQueen was having an on-set affair with Swedish actress Louise Edlind, who played Anna Ritter, the wife of a driver.

Late one evening McQueen was driving Edlind home in the wet. He hit an unexpected turn at high speed and rolled the car. They were both battered and bruised but survived. McQueen realised that if the studio or the press got wind of what had happened his movie and career would be under further pressure.

They didn't call an ambulance and arranged for Mario Iscovich, McQueen's young personal assistant on the movie, to take the blame for the crash. But, in any case, Neile Adams was aware of what was going on in Europe. Edlind wasn't McQueen's only off-screen relationship. His wife finding his absence increasingly stressful and had an affair herself. Hypocritically, McQueen took this to mean the marriage was finished. They divorced two years later.

McQueen was also losing friends and colleagues as his obsession with the movie grew. His relationship soured irreparably with Relyea, whom he blamed for betraying him to the studio

and forcing the new contract on him. They never spoke again.

But in September something happened. When McQueen was filming additional material he insisted on using real racing drivers in the cars. He also insisted on multiple takes to fit the various scripts he was still mulling over.

Motorsport in that era was a dangerous business, three-times Formula 1 champion Jackie Stewart has oft been quoted as saying you had a one in three chance of not making it through your career. British five-time Le Mans winner Derek Bell had already had a lucky escape with minor burns when his car burst into flames, but on the last extra take of the day, British sportscar racer David Piper crashed his car.

His seat stayed attached to the engine mounting as he was thrown into a field. That evening he had his right leg amputated. McQueen had finally reached the nadir. Had there been a script it's likely Piper wouldn't have been injured.

The next day McQueen told Katzin he would work with him and they would get the movie finished. From that moment, script, shooting and storyline came together. Nonetheless they were still

EUROFILE CINEMA



1

From page 37

filming additional material in November, at which point the crew was painting the russet leaves on the trackside green to simulate June. But the movie was made – it took a million feet of film, it was \$1.5 million over budget and it was three months late.

It still made \$22m when it opened the following year, exactly the same as the morally problematic but highly successful *Dirty Harry* starring Clint Eastwood, the other box-office-gold action-star turn of the day, yet movie critics still regard *Le Mans* as a minor hit at best.

In hindsight, the film was never made for the average movie-going audience, but as a project to document motorsport at Le Mans in perhaps its most golden of golden eras it was an overwhelming success. It is now regarded as the quintessential motorsports movie, a cult film in the sense that it transcended its mainstream intention. And the people who McQueen was so desperate to impress loved it. It's probably all that mattered to him in the end.

"It's brilliant, actually a documentary, but still brilliant. It is like a fine vintage wine, it improves every time I see it,"

says Derek Bell. "Steve McQueen thought racing was as creative as film-making," he adds. Maybe being a driver or a fan helps but we should all perhaps be able to comprehend one person's passion when we witness it. "Racing is life," says McQueen's Delaney character in the movie. "Anything that happens before or after is just waiting." It's a quote probably better known than the film itself and is a slogan many sports fans have adopted to their own favourite game and splashed across T-shirts.

Bob Rosen, despite all his misgivings, conceded that: "I think we captured what Steve wanted." McQueen, although he didn't go to the premiere, having fallen out so spectacularly with the producers and the studio, was reportedly happy with his tour de force. "I wanted to get it down on film what I thought it was all about. You see what was in my mind," he told fans.

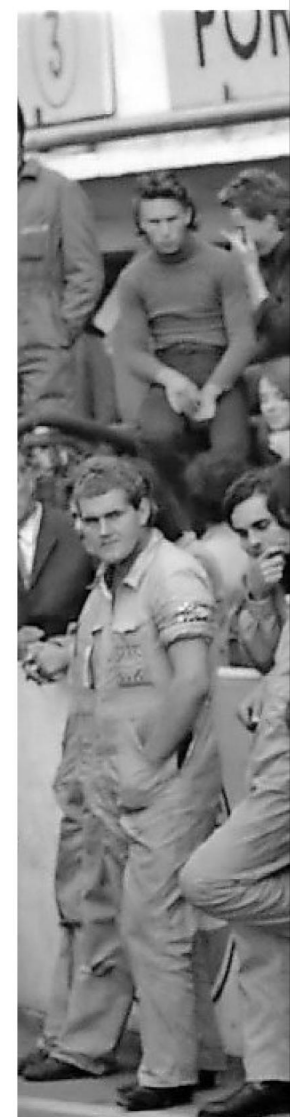
McQueen might have destroyed his marriage, lost personal control of his film, upset his directors, nearly killed a driver, spent way too much money and driven the studio to the point of apoplexy but he got his motor racing movie. He got his authenticity. Fifty years on, it's still probably the finest of them all. And he gave James Garner a good enough reason to piss on his flower beds.

CAMERA CAR

We are so used to cameras in racing cars these days and they are so tiny they go unnoticed from the outside. But if you wanted to film in-car footage back in 1970 you actually had to strap a movie camera onto the car. And, much to the Le Mans organisers' disquiet, Steve McQueen wanted to do it during the race. The Automobile Club de l'Ouest was a punctilious organisation and its doctrine was the rulebook. If the moviemakers wanted to film with cameras on the car they would have to go through qualifying just like everybody else. With an open-topped Porsche 908 (the very car that Steve McQueen drove to second place in Sebring earlier in 1970) weighed down with three hefty cameras that was a tall order. But, under Jonathan Williams, the car's British driver and his colleague Herbert Linge, they scraped into the race. The car had to stop every two laps to change film rolls – there were only six minutes of film per roll – meaning it set a record for the number of pit

stops at Le Mans. In what might be a story of dubious provenance it's been said that although McQueen's insurers wouldn't let him drive in the race he actually did a couple of night-time laps at the wheel of the camera car using the darkness as a cover.

So can you see the car in the movie? Indeed you can – look out for a blue and white car numbered 29. In the DVD version of the film released in 2011 its first brief appearance is in centre shot at 17 minutes and 6 seconds, parked in the pits and partially covered by a tarpaulin. Later, at 26 minutes and 59 seconds, amid the field at the start of the race – one of the key moments the director wanted to capture – you can see it pulling away at the start; a blue open-topped car to the right of the shot getting away faster than those around it. Lastly, it is briefly visible as it flashes past a barn at 80 minutes and 42 seconds. If you've watched all that you may as well check out the movie at 87 minutes and 45 seconds.



2



HAPPIER TIME:
1 Steve McQueen relaxes with the crew during the shooting of *Le Mans*

2 McQueen in a scene from the film

3 McQueen at the Le Mans trials in April 1970. Studio bosses and insurers banned the Hollywood A-lister from taking part

Photo: Getty Images

FOUR OTHER MOTOR RACING MOVIES

Le Mans 66 (2019)

Possibly the antithesis of *Le Mans*. An intriguing tale based on reality but, despite great use of CGI to simulate the old Le Mans pit and startline area, the racing action itself doesn't stand up to scrutiny. Cars are seemingly scattered all over the track, and overtake at improbable speeds. But what saves the movie is the storyline and the acting, especially Christian Bale's irascible take on the complicated British driver Ken Miles who steadfastly refuses to follow his Ford team's orders. He is ably supported by Matt Damon, Caitriona Balfe, Josh Lucas and, playing Henry Ford II, Tracy Letts. The ending didn't need to be tweaked either. The reality was better than the movie's denouement, as Miles deliberately threw away the win when he refused to be part of Ford's stage-managed victory.

Grand Prix (1966)

John Frankenheimer's movie vies with *Le Mans* for the hearts of old-school racing fans. Starring James Garner and Yves Montand it tells the story of four drivers challenging for the Formula 1 World Championship using genuine and staged footage. And while the racing scenes are accomplished and authentic, where it scores is in its depictions of life off the track for the protagonists, and their relationships with colleagues, partners and each other. The opening sequences on the tight track at Monaco and the spectacular and explosive climax on the banking at

Monza are part of motor racing movie folklore.

Winning (1969)

Starring another of Hollywood's motorsports fanatics, Paul Newman – who would eventually own his own racing team – this tells the story of Frank Capua, an American driver set on winning the Indianapolis 500. It uses real footage from races including the shunt at the start of the 1966 500 which eliminated almost a third of the field. Unlike in *Le Mans*, the racing is frequently subservient to Capua's romantic life, and is almost certainly the kind of template the scriptwriters and directors of *Le Mans* were aiming and hoping for.

Cars 2 (2011)

OK, so it's a cartoon, and the middle one of three. But as an exploration of the different attitudes prevalent between North American oval racing and European circuit racing it makes for fun cinematic juxtaposition. It also has a dose of Bond-esque British espionage too. While kids love it, adult motorsports fans get to hear characters voiced by the likes of real-life drivers Lewis Hamilton, Jeff Gordon and Darrell Waltrip. In the French-language version ex-Formula 1 World Champion Jacques Villeneuve plays the race commentator, while Michael Caine and Eddie Izzard voice key personae too. And, the lead character is called Lightning McQueen. A homage to the star of *Le Mans*?



EUROFILE MUSIC

Brazzaville Kinshasa/ CITIES IN MUSIC

SOPHIA DEBOICK on two cities divided by a river but united by style and sounds



Kinshasa – capital of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a former Belgian colony – faces Brazzaville – capital of the much smaller, previously French-held, Republic of the Congo – just across the river for which both countries are named.

The two cities are often uttered in the same breath, possessing a shared culture and common tongue in the Bantu language of Lingala and situated a 15-minute boat ride from each other.

But these are warring twins with very different characters. Comparatively sleepy Brazzaville has just a quarter of the population of seething Kinshasa, and a fundamental antagonism established by colonial rivals was exacerbated as the dictatorship established in the DRC in the mid-1960s posed as a bulwark against communism while the Republic of Congo declared itself a Marxist-Leninist state.

Yet, ordinary Congolese have always flowed freely between the two cities, whether fleeing sporadic violence on one side or the other or visiting family and friends who are scattered across both capitals. The scores, if not hundreds, of music bars in both cities, and the flitting of working musicians between them, have been symbolic of this social bond, and the two capitals have an inextricably linked musical history.

One of the Belgian Congo's educated middle class with no less than a Catholic cardinal for an uncle, Joseph 'Grand Kalle' Kabasele went to Kinshasa, then still Léopoldville, in the late 1940s and went on to pioneer the African rumba, becoming the father of modern Congolese music.

Kabasele's African Jazz evolved out of the group of session musicians employed at Léopoldville's Opika recording studios, including guitarist Docteur Nico, famed for his finger-picked guitar-playing style, and his fellow guitarist brother Charles 'Dechaud' Mwamba.

As the group's leader and singer, Kabasele took his cue both from the popular Cuban rumba of the day and, more idiosyncratically, the Corsican singer and film star Tino Rossi, who was a known all over the Francophone world in the 1930s.

His romantic, crooning ballads were heard throughout the urban streets of colonial Brazzaville and Léopoldville, and the African rumba inevitably emerged as a blend of international influences.

African Jazz were creating a new, distinctively Congolese sound at a time when the growing clamour for independence made one much-needed, and the band travelled to Brussels in 1960 as entertainers-cum-ambassadors during the round table talks about the future of the country. There they wrote, recorded and performed for the delegates their most celebrated song, *Indépendance Cha Cha*. It declared "Oh, independence – we've won it!", while the first verse listed prominent independence leaders, including first prime minister of the new democratic republic, Patrice Lumumba. Meanwhile, their *Table Ronde*

THE HEART OF SMARTNESS



FLAMBOYANT: Adherents of La Sape (an abbreviation of "Société des Ambianceurs et des Personnes Elegantes" or The Society for the Advancement of Elegant People) pose in Kinshasa

Photo: Getty Images

culminated in an impressive solo by Docteur Nico which rendered the confidence of the new nation in sonic form.

But this was a new nation that would be strangled at birth. Lumumba faced insurgency, an army revolt, and then a coup by army chief of staff Joseph-Désiré Mobutu. Lumumba was executed and the country descended into a civil war that culminated in Mobutu being installed as dictator in 1965, remaining there for more than 30 years (the 200-metre Limete Tower, dedicated to Lumumba and one of Kinshasa's main landmarks, was erected by Mobutu in 1971 as the former prime minister was rehabilitated by the regime as a martyr).

As a scarred nation, the DRC struggled for stability, and just as Lumumba had angrily rebutted Belgian king Baudouin's praise of his predecessor Léopold II at the transfer of power ceremony at the parliament building in Léopoldville in June 1960, speaking of "wounds still too fresh and painful to be driven from our memory", Kabasele wrote *Bilombe ba Gagne* (*The Courageous Have Won*), which included the lines "Such was the state of things yesterday/ The black man knew poverty/ Forced labour and the whip". His 1961 B side, *To Yokana Tolimbisana Na Congo* (*Let's Understand and Forgive in the Congo*)

pleaded for Congolese unity as things spiralled out of control.

African Jazz disbanded in 1963, with Docteur Nico and future icon Tabu Ley Rochereau, a man of huge musical influence and fecundity, writing over 3,000 songs (he also fathered 68 children), forming African Fiesta, who all but invented the *soukous* style of pop music – one far more frenetic than the comparatively meditative rumba – and disseminated it across sub-Saharan Africa. But it was OK Jazz, African Jazz's long-time rivals despite being signed to Kabasele's own Surboum African Jazz label, who rose as Léopoldville's premiere band.

More immersed in African sounds than the comparatively genteel Cuban rumba, OK Jazz originated as the session band at Loningisa recording studio in Léopoldville and took their name from the city's OK Bar, where they had debuted in 1955, later taking on the rather bombastic name of Tout Puissant [all-powerful] OK Jazz. Such boldness was reflective of the character of their frontman, Franco Luambo. Raised in Léopoldville and later proprietor of the city's Un-Deux-Trois nightclub, Franco was another towering figure in Congolese music.

Franco was a charismatic guitar god who took *soukous* into a new age, but he



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**NEW EUROPEAN:
KINSHASA/
BRAZZAVILLE**

Featuring:

Independance Cha Cha
Grand Kalle and African Jazz

Malambo Zela Ngai
Franco, OK Jazz

Kiname
Fally Ipupa

Tucheze
Ferre Gola

LES SAPEURS

The streets of Kinshasa and Brazzaville are known for their many sharp-suited men – Les Sapeurs. The subculture of La Sape (Société des Ambianceurs et des Personnes Élégantes) originated in the smaller of the two cities in the 1920s, when Parisian high fashion was adopted as a means of defiance against the colonial authorities. Today, men from all walks of life embrace La Sape as a way of life, not just a form of attire.



also exemplified the corrosive effect on the individual of decades of political oppression in the DRC, as he switched from socially conscious songs that sometimes got him jailed to writing patriotic songs for the Mobutu regime, with which he had become well-connected and through which he had become greatly financially enriched. In a great irony, given his 1987 campaigning song *Attention Na SIDA* (*Beware of AIDS*), he fell victim to the pandemic in 1989, just as the disease was picking up a ferocious pace across Africa.

OK Jazz were a band that straddled Léopoldville-Brazzaville, with half the members hailing from the latter and returning there in 1960 when independence came for both nations. There, the native Brazzavilleans, saxophonists Jean Serge Essous and Nino Malapet, and vocalists Edouard 'Edo' Ganga and Célestin 'Célio' Kouka formed Bantous de la Capitale ('People of the Capital').

Touring throughout the region and even in France, where the sounds of the old colony became *de rigueur*, as well as spawning a dance craze through their 1965 single, *Danse le Boucher*, left OK Jazz as the biggest band in the Republic of the Congo. Yet, as the government increasingly interfered with the band's affairs in their attempts to co-opt them,

leader Essous left in 1966, although they have carried on in ever-amended form ever since.

Today, Brazzaville is the home of the African Music Council, and the alternating biannual Pan-African Music Festival and the Feux de Brazza traditional music festival, while Kinshasa is still a recording hub and boasts the National Institution of Arts, offering higher education in performance and music. Both are among the only 36 global cities with UNESCO City of Music status.

They have come a long way. The Congo was fixed in the imagination as a place of colonial horror by Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* in the late 19th century, and a century on, civil war again saw the region associated with appalling privations. A scramble for conflict minerals, ethnic tensions and violent men with a lust for power continue to throw these nations further off course when they have already suffered terribly through AIDS, and in the case of the DRC, Ebola. While such adversity and a large dose of mutual suspicion means there is still no physical bridge between Brazzaville and Kinshasa, these are cities bound together through common sufferings, but also through song, having given birth together to the African rumba and *soukous* – two of the most defiantly joyful musical genres ever heard.

STAR TURNS BY TIM WALKER



RUNNING MARATHONS IN INSTALMENTS

When Richard Burton uttered the immortal words "Broadsword calling Danny Boy" on his transmitter in the film *Where Eagles Dare*, it was Michael Hordern who picked up at the other end. For a distinguished stage actor whose career spanned more than half a century – the King Lear he played at Stratford in 1969 is the stuff of legend – he was grimly reconciled to the fact he'd probably be most remembered for a minor role in that creaky old war film.

"That was a particularly daft one, but, to be honest, I've never taken all that much satisfaction in any film as you can never really get into a character," he told me. "Just when you start to feel you are, someone shouts 'cut,' so it feels like trying to run a marathon in instalments. You can't get into your stride."

I caught up with Hordern in 1986 when, after losing his wife Eve a few months earlier, he lived in a somewhat cluttered and chaotic flat high up in an old block in Chelsea in central London. On the floor lay the damp pages of a script upon which he'd just spilt a mug of coffee. He was then 76 and admitted he had never realised quite how hard his wife must have toiled to keep the flat clean and tidy.

His year of personal trauma had, however, seen a revival of his professional fortunes after he had a hit playing an eccentric old vicar in a television adaptation of John Mortimer's *Paradise Postponed*. Success seemed to him, however, to be little more than an encumbrance. His telephone was ringing off the hook with calls from journalists in Australia where it was about to be screened. "No, Sir Michael isn't here," he said emphatically to one caller in his all-too-familiar voice.

I suggested we adjourn to a restaurant over the road for a bite to eat. A bottle of Sancerre soon helped to make him wonderfully indiscreet. He talked about all the things actors aren't supposed to talk about – doing advertisements ("I get a twinge of guilt every time I do one, but they are so very remunerative"), colleagues ("Rex Harrison was impossible as a director – I nearly decked him"), job offers ("they want me to do a

play at Chichester, but I can't be bothered"), and what a nightmarish time he'd had up at Stratford during Trevor Nunn's period in charge ("I've nothing against Trevor, but, in all honesty, I didn't feel there was anyone on the bridge").

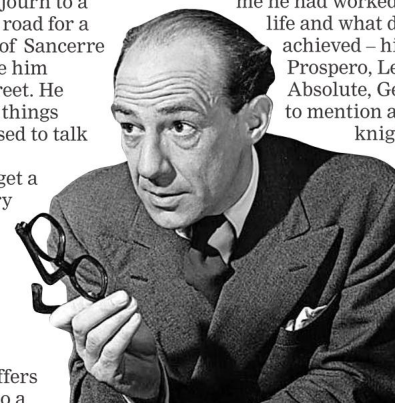
Committing perhaps the ultimate sacrilege, he even had a go at theatre audiences. "About four weeks into the run, there aren't any more intelligent audiences to be had. You get people laughing in all the wrong places and they're silent when something very funny has just been said. That's actually the main reason why I find a long run so exhausting. It isn't that I haven't the stamina. I haven't the patience."

He let slip that he'd been offered the part of Doctor Who when William Hartnell gave it up, but he felt it wasn't his scene. The part he'd yearned for had been the title role in *Rumpole of the Bailey*, and, while he knew its creator John Mortimer well, it went instead to Leo McKern and he admitted he was "heartbroken". Still, he said he'd taken some consolation in narrating an animated BBC adaptation of Michael Bond's *Paddington Bear* books which had been "a lot of fun".

The charming but slightly dotty characters that Hordern made his own on stage and screen were often not entirely unlike the man himself, but he kept apologising throughout our lunch for being boring. "I don't mind at all being boring, even if it can be a bit of a strain on other people. I can only apologise. I think as an actor it's so much easier to assume someone else's character when you haven't got one of your own."

When we'd met, Hordern had just under a decade to live, and, as modest and self-deprecating as he was, it seemed to me he had worked out what mattered in life and what didn't. After all he had achieved – his fine performances as Prospero, Lear, Sir Anthony Absolute, George in *Jumpers*, not to mention a CBE and a

knighthood – he told me he'd lately had the salutary experience of overhearing two little boys squabbling as he'd made a call in a telephone box. "When I finally emerged, one of them asked me if I was by any chance Paddington bear."



FAMILIAR VOICE: Michael Hordern as Christopher Williams, head of the National Atomic Board, in the stage adaptation of the television play *Party Manners*, 1950

Photo: Getty Images

EUROFILE BOOKS

CHARLIE CONNELLY

on how the great author ended up at his final resting place, far from where he had hoped to be



|| Charles Dickens, the great American romancer, died yesterday of apoplexy. He was the Walter Scott of America."

As bad takes go, that report of the demise of the great novelist that appeared in a New Orleans newspaper really is a doozy. Believe it or not, it wasn't the worst either. That accolade goes instead to a paper in Mississippi, which solemnly noted the passing of "George Dickens, the well-known author of *Boz* and *The Mystery of Druidism*".

Fortunately Dickens' death on June 9 1870, 150 years ago this week, was better marked elsewhere, triggering a global wave of sadness at the demise of the man many argue was the greatest fiction writer in the history of literature in English.

Dickens' work remains popular largely because its themes of compassion and humanity in the face of crippling social injustice endure, comprising stories whose emotional impact resonates today. Dickens' voice speaks clearly to us a century and half after it was silenced making it perhaps appropriate his funeral was not dissimilar to those taking place across the country during the current pandemic. The circumstances couldn't have been more different, however.

Dickens, 58 when he died, had spent June 8, 1870 working on what would turn out to be his final novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, at his home at Gad's Hill, near Rochester in Kent. That evening he suffered a stroke at the dinner table, lingered for 24 hours and despite the attendance of John Russell Reynolds, the nation's leading specialist in neurological disorders who had rushed down on the train from London, died in the early evening of June 9 without regaining consciousness.

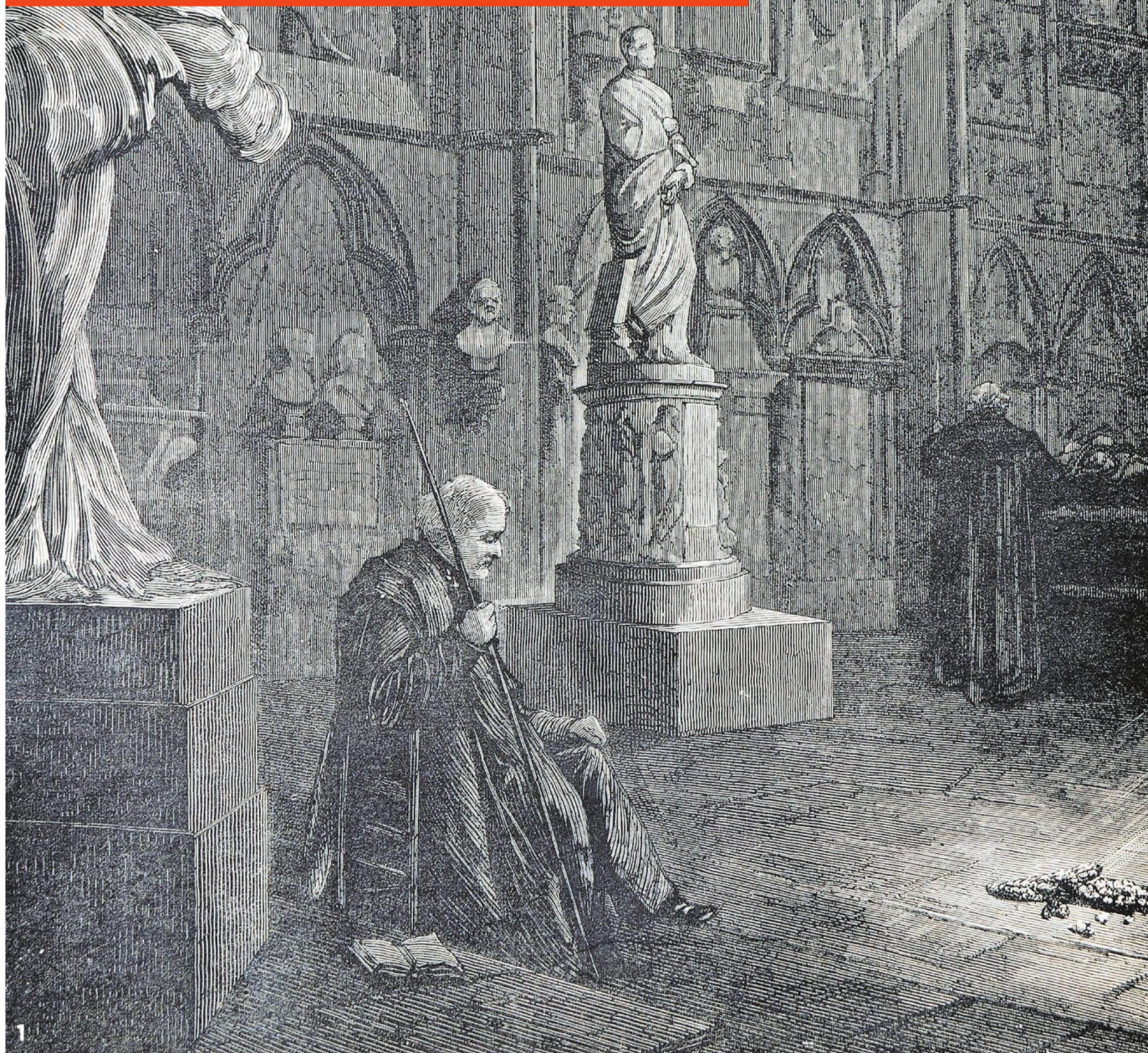
"One whom young and old, wherever the English language is spoken, have come to regard as a personal friend is suddenly taken away from us," lamented the *Times* the following day. "Charles Dickens is no more."

The news spread quickly across the country and to the world beyond, notably America where he had conducted a number of highly successful reading tours. French newspapers published solemn tributes, comparing him favourably to their own Honoré de Balzac. Queen Victoria sent a telegram of condolence to the family from Balmoral. Detailed descriptions of his last hours – "his limbs were flaccid until half an hour before death, when some convulsion occurred" – were published in a manner recognisable today: Dickens' celebrity was so great even something as intimate as death was public property.

No detail was too obscure or too personal, not even the relative dilations of his pupils in his last hours (the right was more dilated than the left, fact fans). Celebrity, then a fledgling concept in the

GREAT EXPIRATION

THE DEATH OF CHARLES DICKENS AND ITS CURIOUS AFTERMATH



form we know today, triumphed over personal dignity.

His funeral, however, was another matter. As the most famous person in the country after the Queen herself, Dickens' passing cried out for spectacle, the opportunity for the country to say goodbye to its greatest writer in the most sumptuous manner of mourning available. Inconveniently, the writer himself sought to vanish with as little

brouhaha as possible. His will was unequivocal on the matter:

"I emphatically direct that I be buried in an inexpensive, unostentatious, and strictly private manner; that no public announcement be made of the time or place of my burial, that at the utmost not more than three plain mourning coaches be employed, and that those who attend my funeral wear no scarf, cloak, black bow, long hatband, or other such

revolting absurdity," it read. "I direct that my name be inscribed in plain English letters on my tomb without the addition of 'Mr' or 'Esquire'. I conjure my friends on no account to make me the subject of any monument, memorial, or testimonial whatever. I rest my claims to the remembrance of my country upon my published works, and to the remembrance of my friends upon their experience of me."

BOOKS EUROFILE



RESTING PLACE:
1 The grave of Charles Dickens at Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey

2 Charles Dickens

3 Dickens' long-time mistress Ellen Ternan
 Photos: Getty Images



While he micromanaged his send-off to the extent of specifying a maximum number of carriages for mourners, nowhere in the document had Dickens identified precisely where he wanted to be buried.

Close friends and relatives said he'd talked of being laid to rest near Gad's Hill, in the graveyard of a parish church such as those at Cobham or Shorne, or perhaps the small cemetery in the former moat at Rochester Castle. None of these were open for new burials, the family was told.

Instead Rochester Cathedral looked to be the best candidate as Dickens' final resting place. A bit snazzier than he'd had in mind, for sure, but it was still local and as long as nobody turned up in a hatband of more than medium length Dickens probably wouldn't end up spinning in his freshly-dug grave. The Dean and Chapter of the cathedral were amenable and, with the cemetery in the grounds of the cathedral full, they prepared a grave in the Lady Chapel inside the building itself.

Now, given that Dickens had, for the final 13 years of his life, conducted a clandestine relationship with the actress Ellen Ternan which began when he was 45 and she 18, and treated his wife Catherine abominably for most of their married life, placing his remains in a chapel devoted to the mother of Christ might have raised a wry eyebrow or two among the very few people who knew about Dickens' closely-guarded romantic shenanigans. As it turned out, the Kentish tomb would remain unoccupied. From the moment news broke of Dickens' death plans were afoot for a more glamorous location.

In the milky dawn light of June 14, 1870, Dickens' body was taken by hearse from Gad's Hill to Rochester railway station and placed on a specially arranged train which travelled at a stately pace to Charing Cross station in central London, arriving at nine o'clock on the dot. A small band of mourners met the coffin and followed it in the specified three carriages to Westminster Abbey where Dickens was to take his eternal rest in the famous Poets' Corner.

"The wish of the people had prevailed," said the following day's *Times*, "and Charles Dickens rests in the Abbey church of St Peter in Westminster."

According to the *Manchester Guardian*

it was "owing to the universal wish that he be laid to rest with other worthies of English literature" that Dickens was buried not as he might have hoped in the sun-dappled peace of a country churchyard but in the cavernous abbey at the heart of London and of British history.

There appears to be little documentary evidence for this decision being anything like the will of the people. There were no letters to the newspapers demanding Dickens' interment among the literary great and good and the only mention of its possibility came in a speculative *Times* leader on June 13, the day before the funeral. The *Daily News* even noted the day after the ceremony that, "the announcement in the evening papers yesterday afternoon that the interment had taken place in Westminster Abbey yesterday morning took the public by surprise".

Recently, however, Dickens scholar Professor Leon Litvack of Queen's University, Belfast, discovered the Westminster burial was cooked up between the author's friend and posthumous biographer John Forster and the Dean of Westminster Abbey himself, Arthur Stanley. Forster felt a simple rural burial would not provide a grand enough climax to Dickens' life, not to mention the book he was writing, while Stanley had been hoping for a marquee name to bury in order to re-establish Poets' Corner as a national shrine, there having been no true literary superstars interred there since Dr Samuel Johnson in 1784. The whole "wish of the people" line was an invention; the population had expressed no strong collective opinion either way.

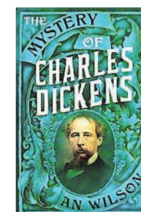
Despite the scheming of Forster and Stanley commencing almost as soon as Dickens breathed his last, the excavation of a grave at Westminster didn't begin until after midnight on the Monday, barely nine hours before the small funeral cortege arrived.

It's unlikely from the wording of his will that Dickens would have had Westminster Abbey in mind for his eternal rest. For one thing, a quiet country churchyard would have been easier for Ellen Ternan to visit unobserved, for another his distaste for the mawkish faff involved in Victorian funerals was well documented. If his will hadn't make it clear enough, a year

FIVE GREAT BOOKS PUBLISHED THIS MONTH

THE MYSTERY OF CHARLES DICKENS
 A.N. Wilson

(Atlantic, £17.99)
 Published to coincide with the 150th anniversary of Dickens' death, Victorian specialist Wilson goes beyond conventional biography to draw out from the author's life the events and motivations that fired his creative imagination. Delving into the novels as well as Dickens' life story, Wilson identifies the parallels between fact and the fiction in a thoughtful and engaging analysis.



Booker Prize – the eponymous Vernon leaves his disciples for Paris to visit his dentist. On arrival he learns that Charles, his old friend from the streets, has died, leaving him half of a substantial lottery win. Set against the city's terrorist atrocities of 2015 and 2016, this is as raw and rewarding as readers of the first two instalments will expect.

THIS HAPPY
 Niamh Campbell
 (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, £19.99)

A highly-anticipated debut from Dublin-based Campbell. When Alannah was 23 she met an older, married man, fell in love and early in the relationship stayed in a rural Irish cottage with him. Six years on, newly married to another man, she catches sight of the cottage's landlady and the memories, good and bad, come flooding back. Dramatic consequences are inevitable.



PILGRIMS
 Matthew Kneale

(Atlantic, £16.99)
 Another hotly-anticipated slice of peripatetic historical fiction from the author of the hugely popular *English Passengers*. *Pilgrims* transports us back to the late 13th century to follow a group of English travellers making their way to Rome seeking absolution for a range of sins, worries and motivations. Not many novelists can evoke a period as far back as 700 years but we're there for every step of this absorbing journey into the medieval world.



VERNON SUBUTEX THREE
 Virginie Despentes

(Maclehose Press, £14.99)
 Completing the *Vernon Subutex* trilogy – part one was shortlisted for the Man International



JAMES AND NORA: A PORTRAIT OF A MARRIAGE

Edna O'Brien
 (Wiedenfeld & Nicolson, £6.99)
 A reissue of O'Brien's slim 1981 evocation of James Joyce's and Nora Barnacle's marriage from their first arranged meeting on June 16, 1904. The date was later used by Joyce as the setting for the events of *Ulysses*, now celebrated every year in Dublin as Bloomsday. Published as part of the current very welcome resurgence of interest in O'Brien and her work.



almost to the day before his death he'd declined an invitation to inaugurate a new monument at the grave of essayist and poet Leigh Hunt in Kensal Green cemetery in north London because he had "a very strong objection to speech making beside graves" and "the idea of ever being the subject of such a ceremony is so repugnant to my soul that I must decline to officiate".

He did get his desired no frills, sparsely attended funeral though, one similar in such respects to the many happening across the country in these pandemic times, 150 years on.

Barely a dozen friends and relatives, including Forster and Wilkie Collins, stepped from the carriages and entered the abbey, none of them clad in what one report called "the dismal frippery of the undertaker" as per instructions. Reports noted 14 mourners but gave only 13 names – was the missing name Ellen Ternan, omitted for reasons of decorum?

Either way Dickens' grave had been prepared at the feet of George Frideric Handel and next to that of Thomas Macaulay (in the following century both

Thomas Hardy and Rudyard Kipling would be placed alongside Dickens). Dean Stanley officiated and other than a single voluntary on the organ there was no music, no hymns, not even spoken responses to the funeral oratory.

The grave was left open for the day to allow people to pay their respects as the word spread through the city, especially once the evening papers arrived on the streets.

One thousand people were still waiting outside when the abbey doors closed at six o'clock that evening and it would be October, more than three months after the occasion, before the floral tributes, from wreaths to single blooms plucked spontaneously from buttonholes, would be removed to reveal the simple brass inscription laid into the dark stone, displaying just his name and the dates of his birth and death.

Somewhere at the back of the crowds paying tribute, maybe there was a Mississippi voice asking in a stage whisper whether this was the place where they buried George Dickens, the *Mystery of Druidism* guy.

EUROFILE POEM AND PUZZLES

a poem for europe



SHWAN ZIAD is a writer in London. He's written for *Times Literary Supplement* and has a forthcoming book of poems (Tuba Press).

I SEE

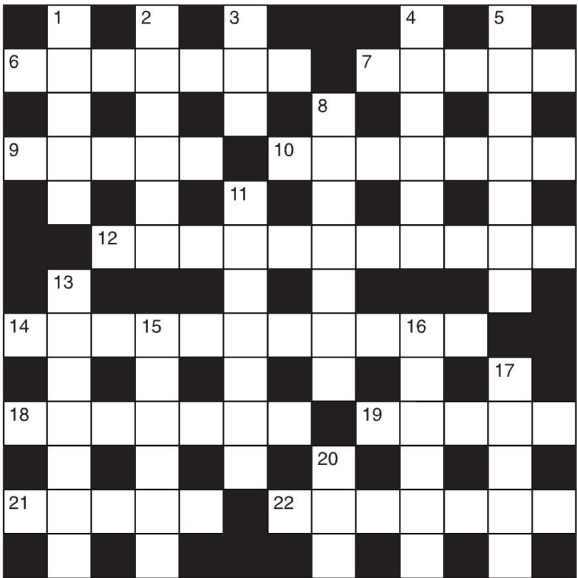
I see, a time beyond the walls of misery
Into an expanse, chance to master and muster,
To rise, beyond the hereafter into the cluster
Of chatty crowds, and spilling pubs, ringing
With activity, the heart-vibrating, killing
The spread of bad voodoo, by burst
Bodies and bonhomie, eager out of thirst
Increased pent-up world, hurled into confusion



Cryptic crosswords sponsored by www.dormontestate.com

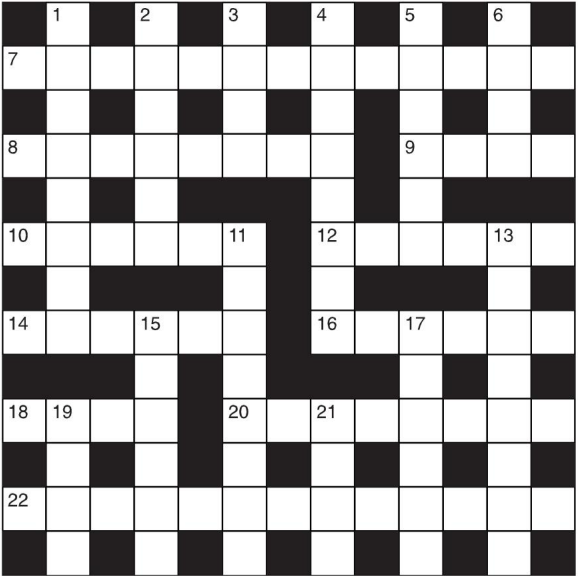
Cryptic 1

- Across**
- 6. Uses some charm – everybody sure to be confused (7)
 - 7. Cosy place for the start of a new life, we hear (5)
 - 9. For this stunt, put busy worker in charge (5)
 - 10. Being prejudiced, I depart in shocking debt (7)
 - 12. Presumably no pointless contest! (6,5)
 - 14. Prime piece of instruction in the service (5,6)
 - 18. Work by newspaper reporters to impose a heavy load (7)
 - 19. Take off for southern tour (5)
 - 21. See 2 Down.
 - 22. See 15 Down.
- Down**
- 1 & 5 Down. A protracted spell on the rack – the result of serious crime! (1,4,7)
 - 2 Down & 21 Across. This is used for cleaning – no piece must be broken (6,5)
 - 3. The bird to provide a quill (3)
 - 4. One's backing the artist – a girl from Barcelona (6)
 - 5. See 1 Down.
 - 8. This will cause ill-health – Diana's needing relaxation (7)
 - 11. Worship what is destroyed by iconoclasts? (7)
 - 13. Argue about being placed in a disorganised side (7)
 - 15 Down & 22 Across. Did some seasonal work – watch mechanism serviced (6-7)
 - 16. To exile is not in the legal procedure (6)
 - 17. See 20 Down.
 - 20 & 17 Down. Veteran convict? (3-5)

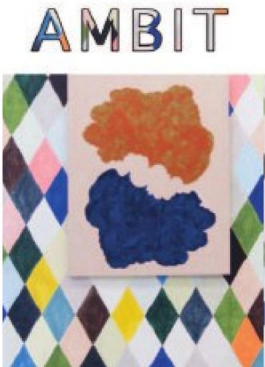


Cryptic 2

- Across**
- 7. Fail to understand and so annihilate (4,7,2)
 - 8. Study poetry or the opposite (8)
 - 9. Thought I had Eva, but she lost heart (4)
 - 10. Money for release of Romans (6)
 - 12. Something for the writer to dip into (6)
 - 14. Monkey proves a benefit to graduate (6)
 - 16. Avoids committing oneself to growing boundaries (6)
 - 18. Separate role (4)
 - 20. Get rid of horses that aren't steady? (8)
 - 22. Making firm comfort I should have around (13)
- Down**
- 1. Wide view alternatively held in canal country (8)
 - 2. Abandons what some plants shed (6)
 - 3. Space around to tie up (4)
 - 4. Like a lamb later in life? (8)
 - 5. Reverse one's selection? (6)
 - 6. The only fish (4)
 - 11. Boldly take on a complete crew (8)
 - 13. Be too much a spectator and so far fail to notice? (8)
 - 15. Not set for being tried out (2,4)
 - 17. Scarcity of thread (6)
 - 19. Minute particle to be seen in the morning (4)
 - 21. How the team was affected? (4)



A poem for Europe is edited by Briony Bax, Poetry Editor.
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Crossword solutions

Cryptic 1

Across: 6. Allures; 7. Berth; 9. Antic; 10. Bigoted; 12. Needle match; 14. First lesson; 18. Oppress; 19. Strip; 21. Stone; 22. Cleaned. **Down:** 1. A long; 2. Punice; 3. Pen; 4. Senora; 5. Stretch; 8. Disease; 11. Idolise; 13. Dispute; 15. Spring; 16. Outlaw; 17. Timer; 20. Old.

Cryptic 2

Across: 7. Make nothing of; 8. Converse; 9. Idea; 10. Ransom; 12. Inkpot; 14. Baboon; 16. Hedges; 18. Part; 20. Unstable; 22. Consolidation. **Down:** 1. Panorama; 2. Leaves; 3. Moor; 4. Sheepish; 5. Unpick; 6. Sole; 11. Manfully; 13. Overlook; 15. On test; 17. Death; 19. Atom; 21. Side.

Sudoku solutions

Medium 1

1	6	3	7	4	2	8	5	9
8	2	5	6	3	9	7	1	4
9	7	4	5	8	1	3	2	6
4	3	9	1	2	8	5	6	7
7	8	6	4	9	5	2	3	1
2	5	1	3	6	7	9	4	8
5	9	8	2	1	4	6	7	3
6	4	2	8	7	3	1	9	5
3	1	7	9	5	6	4	8	2

Medium 2

6	2	7	4	3	5	8	9	1
4	3	8	1	2	9	7	5	6
5	1	9	6	7	8	4	2	3
3	9	1	5	8	7	2	6	4
8	6	5	9	4	2	1	3	7
7	4	2	3	6	1	9	8	5
1	5	6	2	9	4	3	7	8
2	7	4	8	5	3	6	1	9
9	8	3	7	1	6	5	4	2

Hard 1

4	8	3	1	7	9	5	6	2
1	7	6	4	2	5	3	8	9
2	5	9	3	6	8	7	4	1
8	1	7	9	5	3	4	2	6
3	6	2	8	4	7	9	1	5
5	9	4	6	1	2	8	7	3
7	3	1	2	9	4	6	5	8
6	4	8	5	3	1	2	9	7
9	2	5	7	8	6	1	3	4

Hard 2

3	4	7	9	2	8	6	1	5
6	1	9	3	4	5	7	2	8
5	2	8	1	6	7	3	4	9
9	7	4	2	5	1	8	6	3
2	3	1	6	8	9	4	5	7
8	6	5	7	3	4	2	9	1
4	9	2	8	1	3	5	7	6
1	8	6	5	7	2	9	3	4
7	5	3	4	9	6	1	8	2

Sudoku – medium 1

	6		7		2			
8						7	1	
		4	5		1		2	
4		9		2		5		7
			4		5			
2		1		6		9		8
	9		2		4	6		
	4	2						5
			9		6		8	

Sudoku – medium 2

	2				5	8		1
4		8			9			
	1				8	4		3
				8		2	6	4
				9	2			
7	4	2		6				
1		6	2				7	
			8			6		9
9		3	7				4	

Sudoku – hard 1

4				7		5		
			4	2	5			
		9						1
	1				3		2	
3	6						1	5
	9		6				7	
7						6		
			5	3	1			
		5		8				4

Sudoku – hard 2

		7			8		1	
						7	2	8
5			6				4	
			2		1			3
		1				4		
8			7		4			
	9			1				6
1	8	6						
	5		4			1		

Numberfit

Fit the listed numbers into each grid.

Numberfit 1

2 digits: – 38 – 41 – 74 – 75
 3 digits: – 147 – 174 – 247 – 471 – 589 – 727 – 741 – 871 – 918 – 957
 4 digits: – 4732 – 4772 – 7312 – 7493
 5 digits: – 77372 – 87337
 7 digits: – 2179718 – 2977918
 9 digits: – 558728048 – 634129848 – 832149875 – 858778946

Numberfit 2

2 digits: 34 – 83
 3 digits: 478 – 487 – 573 – 599 – 892 – 916 – 919 – 977 – 979 – 995
 5 digits: 26948 – 37942
 6 digits: 279834 – 324783 – 391176 – 471914
 7 digits: 3327956 – 3398239 – 5999253 – 9354923
 9 digits: 919999919 – 929999929 – 939999939

TEAR UP RULE ON SPLIT INFINITIVES

PETER TRUDGILL boldly goes on about one of the most controversial grammatical issues of all



English forms like *to sleep*, *to run*, and *to read* are technically called infinitives. In the sentence “I want to go”, *to go* is an infinitive. When we want to talk about a particular English verb, we normally cite the infinitival form, as in “the verb *to go* is irregular”. Infinitives can also occur without the *to*: in “You can go”, *go* is an infinitive.

Some languages do not have infinitives. In Modern Greek ‘you can go’ is *thelo na pao*, ‘I-want that I-go’. But in languages which do have infinitives, these often consist of a single word: the French for ‘to go’ is *aller*, the German is *gehen*, and the Latin is *ire*. The Scandinavian languages, on the other hand, have two-word infinitives like English: ‘to go’ in Norwegian is *å gå*.

I have written before about non-existent ‘rules’ of English grammar which have been invented by would-be authorities, such as the particularly daft one stating that you must not end a sentence with a preposition.

Sometimes, we actually know when and where such ‘rules’ were concocted. According to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, a ‘rule’ about infinitives was published in 1803 by John Comley in his *English Grammar Made Easy to the Teacher and Pupil*.

The rule he invented was: “an adverb should not be placed between a verb of the infinitive mood and the preposition to which governs it”. This is where many people got the idea from that it is wrong to ‘split’ an infinitive, as in “to boldly go where no man has gone before”, as was said of the Starship Enterprise in *Star Trek*.

It is not clear why this American writer came to think that way about infinitives. Perhaps the fact that infinitives are single, unsplitable words in Latin had something to do with it – another example of a misguided attempt to impose Latin grammar on English.

It is no surprise, though, to learn that he was an American: a majority of Americans are descended from people who were not native speakers of English, and there has always been a stronger tendency in the USA for people to worry about speaking and writing ‘correctly’ than there ever has been here.

This rule became popular with those who derive pleasure from giving instructions to other people about how they should speak their own language. But there is

really no need for the rest of us to be concerned: the ‘rule’ is complete nonsense, and we can ignore it, just as the Norwegians do – they have never even heard of it, because no one ever invented a similar rule for Norwegian.

The Norwegian for “to boldly go where no man has gone before” is *å modig gå der ingen har gått før*, where *å modig gå* is literally ‘to boldly go’.

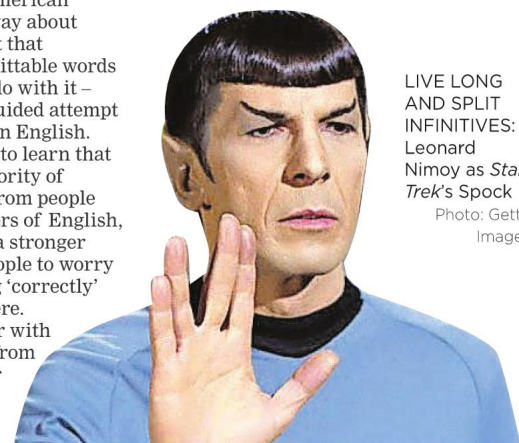
In his book *Mind the Gaffe*, Professor Larry Trask – it is only fair to point out he was American – very wisely observed that it is the split infinitive which makes the meaning clear in a sentence like “She decided to gradually get rid of the teddy bears she had collected”.

This is the best way of indicating elegantly and unambiguously that the decision was to dispose of the bears gradually over time. No other word order works as well. If you ‘un-split’ the infinitive and write “She decided gradually to get rid of the teddy bears”, that could be interpreted as meaning that it was the decision which was gradual. “She decided to get rid of the teddy bears she had collected gradually” could mean that it was the collecting that was gradual; and “She decided to get gradually rid of the teddy bears that she had collected” is very awkward.

Our famous poets and writers have demonstrated over the centuries that there is nothing wrong with using split infinitives. All attempts to completely and utterly remove split infinitives from English are bound to fail.

CONCOCT

The word *concoct* appears to have come into English during the 1500s. It derives from the Latin verb *concoquere*, which itself is made up of *con*, ‘with’, and *coquere*, ‘to boil’. Its original Latin meaning was ‘to boil together’ as in preparing a stew or some other mixture of ingredients.



LIVE LONG AND SPLIT INFINITIVES: Leonard Nimoy as *Star Trek*'s Spock
 Photo: Getty Images

EUROFILE GREAT LIVES

GREAT EUROPEAN LIVES

BY CHARLIE CONNELLY

#150

JOSEPH BOLOGNE,
CHEVALIER DE
SAINT-GEORGES

DECEMBER 25, 1745 – JUNE 12, 1799

On April 9, 1787, at the behest of the Prince of Wales, an unusual fencing match took place in London between Mademoiselle d'Eon, a French former diplomat and spy who lived as a woman for decades, and Joseph Bologne, Chevalier de Saint-George, one of Europe's finest fencers of the age.

"The novelty of a lady in petticoats engaging the most able and experienced master of the noble science of defence excited universal pleasantry," wrote a spectator afterwards. "Even such as had formerly known her *en culottes* were not a little surprised at the skill she showed at fencing with Mr Saint-George."

Strange as it sounds, the Mademoiselle, who had variously fought as a soldier during the Seven Years War and lived in Empress Elizabeth of Russia's court as a woman, was the least remarkable of the two combatants. Her opponent was a man who lived an extraordinary life in extraordinary circumstances.

Joseph Bologne wrote three string quartets, two symphonies, six comic operas, three violin sonatas and 14 violin concertos that are still performed more than 200 years after his death. He was one of the finest violinists of an era that produced more than its fair share of *virtuosi*, was regarded as the best fencer in Europe and was a leading light of the campaign to abolish slavery in Britain and France. He performed for and with European royalty and drew considerable crowds to the concert halls and fencing pistes of the continent's highest capitals of culture. John Adams, the president of the United States, described Bologne as "the most accomplished man in Europe", yet there's still a strong chance you've never heard of him.

The reason why can possibly be found in an item that appeared in British newspapers during December 1786 that noted how Saint-George was "superior at the sword" and praised his peerless abilities as a dancer.

"He plays seven instruments beyond any individual in the world," it gushed, "and speaks 26 languages, maintaining public theses in each."

Then came the pay-off.

"He walks around the various sciences like the master of each," it read, "and, strange to be mentioned to white men, this Mr St George is a mulatto, the son of an African mother."

To this day Joseph Bologne is more often than not referred to as the 'Black Mozart' when by rights his achievements deserve neither qualification nor comparison. He lived through some of Europe's most tumultuous times, often finding himself at

the heart of them, and overcame a number of obstacles to succeed in a variety of fields. If the polymath traditionally struggles to achieve the respect they deserve, a black polymath in late 18th century Europe had to struggle more than most. He would always remain an outsider.

Bologne was born on Christmas Day, 1745, at Basse-Terre on the island of Guadeloupe in the Caribbean Sea. His father was George de Bologne Saint-Georges, a 34-year-old slaver and plantation owner, and his mother Ann, a 16-year-old slave in the service of George's wife.

Unusually for a time when slaves of African descent were regarded by their owners as savages, George was not only willing to acknowledge his paternal responsibility but act upon it too. When Joseph was seven years old his father took him to France and placed him in a boarding school, returning two years later with Ann and installing mother and son in an apartment in the Saint-Germain district of Paris.

Bologne showed early promise as a violinist, harpsichordist and particularly as a fencer; entering the elite fencing academy of Nicolas Texier de La Böessière at 13 and emerging six years later as a swordsman so accomplished, he became a member of the king's guard with the title Chevalier de Saint-Georges. Agile, intelligent and skilful, he was the most highly sought-after name at fencing events on both sides of the English Channel, rarely allowing opponents to even score a hit let alone win a match.

Yet it would be as a musician and composer that Bologne would make his name. By 1769 he had become such an accomplished violinist with the Parisian orchestra Le Concert des Amateurs that he was elevated to concert master. Three years later he became a soloist and in 1773 Bologne was appointed director of the orchestra. The influential *L'Almanach Musical* wrote in 1775 that the orchestra under Bologne's direction was "the best orchestra for symphonies in Paris and perhaps in Europe".

His own brilliance as a performer was such that leading contemporary composers wrote violin concertos specifically for him and he filled concert halls and salons wherever he went, often performing his own compositions. Before long he was tutoring, performing for and performing with Marie Antoinette at the palace in Versailles.

It wasn't all plain sailing, however. On a visit to England he was confronted in the street by a man armed with a pistol demanding his valuables. When Bologne disarmed the man, according to one report "four more rogues hidden until then

attacked him and he put them all out of commission. M. de Saint Georges received only some contusions which did not keep him from going on that night to play music in the company of friends". It's probable that this was an assassination attempt at the behest of supporters of the slave trade.

Bologne had been criss-crossing the Channel regularly at that time, partly to perform concerts and recitals but mostly to lend his support to the increasingly powerful anti-slavery lobby in England. He met regularly with abolitionists like William Wilberforce and John Wilkes and assisted in translating British abolitionist pamphlets into French for the Société des amis des Noirs, the Society of Friends of Black People, that he'd helped to establish in France.

When revolution broke out in 1789 Bologne, despite his aristocratic connections, immediately sided with the revolutionaries. In the manifesto of the revolution he saw a perfect opportunity to end both the French slave trade and the inequalities and injustices experienced by black people in France. For all that he'd raised himself to the highest echelons of French society there were always barriers and humiliations. As a black man he was barred from inheriting his father's titles and forbidden to marry a woman from the higher classes.

When the revolution broke out, Bologne became one of the first to volunteer for the new Garde Nationale. By 1792 he was a colonel in command of the 1,000-strong Légion franche de cavalerie des Américains et du Midi, the first regiment of any European army to be made up entirely of black soldiers (including the swashbuckling Thomas-Alexandre Dumas, father of Three Musketeers novelist Alexandre Dumas).

So successful a leader was Bologne that before long the unit became known simply as the Légion St-Georges. But despite leading his troops with distinction, Bologne's extracurricular musical activities – he even formed a small orchestra of military men – contributed to accusations that he was not giving the revolution his full attention. In November 1793 he was arrested under the new French Law of Suspects and imprisoned without charge as part of the Great Terror until after almost a year the Committee of Public Safety found that Bologne had been removed from his command without cause. He was released from prison but would never regain his command.

While it must have come as some consolation that while he was in prison the National Convention abolished slavery in the French colonies, for all his achievements, for all his brilliance in music, fencing and as a military leader, Joseph Bologne was tainted by prejudice throughout his life. Tropes still familiar today were whispered and sometimes expressed openly, such as this snippet from the *Times* in September 1789 referring to his conduct on the fencing piste.

"Mr St George acquired his 'war whoop' in excursions against the Cherubee Indians," it said inaccurately of his occasional exuberant yelps during fencing. "It may be a very proper accompaniment for a tomahawk or scalping knife, but it surely is very unbecoming in the elegant exercise of the sword."

Never mind he composed some of the most exquisite violin concertos ever written. To the ignorant, he would always be a savage.

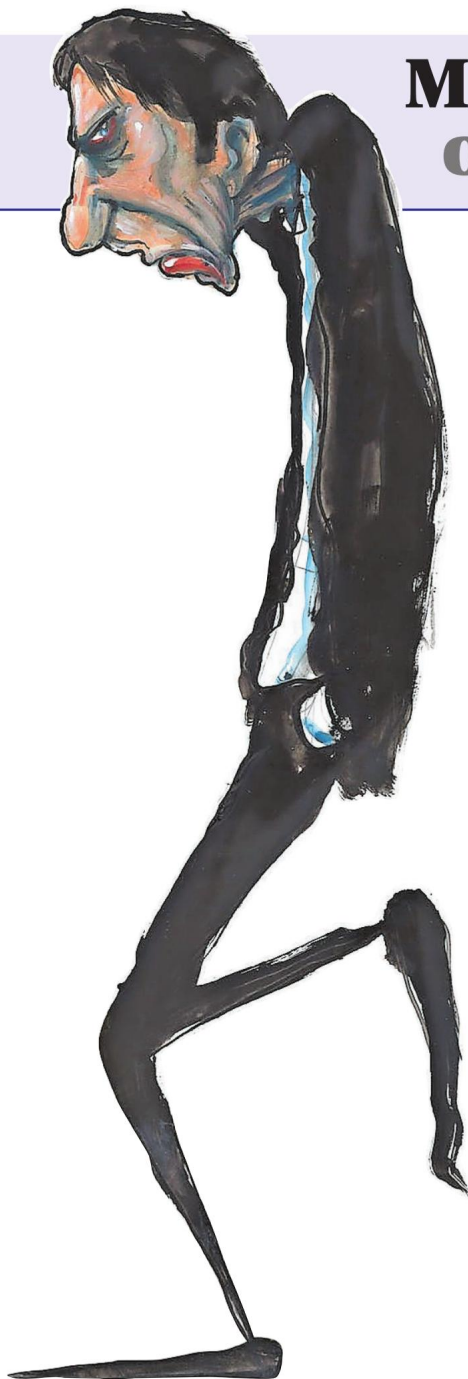
WILL SELF

So farewell then to Christo, the Bulgarian-born artist who has died aged 84, and who, together with his French wife Jeanne-Claude Denat de Guillebon (who predeceased him in 2010), produced some of the largest and most extravagantly silly artworks the world has ever seen. Beginning humbly in Cologne, in 1968, by wrapping up a few barrels on the quayside, the couple just kept on with their *couverture*, encasing an entire bay on the coast of New South Wales in the 1969, the Pont Neuf in Paris in 1985, and eventually the Reichstag in Berlin in 1995, only six years after the fall of the Wall. Two years ago Christo at last came to my hometown, accompanied by 7,506 of his by now 'signature' plastic barrels. These ones he stacked up into a bizarre sort of tetrahedron shape, which he called *Mastaba*, and sited in the middle of the Serpentine in Hyde Park.

I often cycle that way en route to Paddington Station, so throughout the summer of 2018 I had ample opportunities to meditate on Christo and De Guillebon's oeuvre. In their favour was the ephemerality of their practice – Christo wished, unlike most other artists and architects, to leave nothing behind: the works were temporary follies, intended to make those who witnessed them feel a giddy sort of joy at such playfulness. Fair enough – and welcome contrast to the wilful portentousness of the so-called 'land-artists' of the 1960s and 1970s, whose works, by contrast, enacted an arid and aestheticised form of gigantism. Also in the wrap-artist's favour was the non-commercial nature of the works – they never accepted any corporate sponsorship, preferring to fund their projects by selling their plans for them.

But despite their ephemerality and their seeming liberality, there remains something altogether bounded about the Christo-De Guillebon vision. To paraphrase Shelley: "Two vast and trunkless legs of stone / Stand in the desert... near them on the sand lies an enormous piece of cloth that once clad them." By which I mean to express the idea that while the wrapping may have been discarded, the objects that gave that wrapping any salience remain – and it's these that, for the most part made the works at all significant. *Mastaba* is of course entirely gone – but if I think back to the weird interlude when a giant ziggurat of barrels dominated this boating lake, all I recall is that it was created by the same man who wrapped up the Reichstag. The artwork itself did have a considerable aura – but that resided in this improbability: its juxtaposition with the topography of a landscaped English park; *Mastaba* looked like a desktop toy of some sort, writ impossibly huge.

And it's here, in their distortions of scale that the meanings of Christo and De Guillebon's works really reside. Such changes always deprive us of the sensual aspects of an object – while making them more intelligible: a scale map allows us to orient ourselves within a landscape, but we can't feel the ache in our thighs from climbing a steep hill when we simply run our eye over some contour lines. By wrapping up the Reichstag, Christo and De Guillebon made a gift of this very large building – and



Multicultural Man .. on interpreting art



PLAYFUL: Bulgarian artist Christo Vladimirov Javacheff, better known as 'Christo', with his artwork, *Mastaba* in the Serpentine at London's Hyde Park, 2018
Photo: Getty Images

in so doing showed what? That democracy is itself ephemeral? That all things must pass? Or quite possibly that the German parliament was itself a commodity – in the Marxist sense – and thereby capable of being fetishised: having our own distorted picture of human relationships of production and exchange projected on to its rippling flanks.

Of course, all such 'interpretations' are wilfully tendentious – and for that reason they're resisted by not just by the wrappers, but all self-respecting artists. Self-respecting – and money-earning – because without the mystique conferred by the alleged difficulty of their interpretation, works like *Mastaba* (if you'll forgive the procrustean pun) just look like a load of w**k. Which is not to say a load of w**k is necessarily a bad thing – for it, too, can be joyful (if necessarily ephemeral). But this load-of-w**k problem doesn't just relate to Christo and De Guillebon's work – arguably it's present in a whole posse of late 20th and early 21st century artists who make distortions in scale central to their method. Damien Hirst and Antony Gormley follow in the giant footsteps of Claes Oldenburg – who in turn dogged those of Marcel Duchamp.

The latter is famous for *Fountain*, a men's urinal exhibited as an artwork – but really, Duchamp's most acute piece of arty-subversion was his *Boîte-en-Valise* (*Box-in-a-Suitcase*), which took the form of a travelling salesman's sample case from the interwar period, but which contained (in various iterations) miniatures of all of Duchamp's own works. The wall-mounted *pissoir* certainly took the piss effectively out of the way the gallery creates the artwork rather than the artist – but the *Boîte* shows that aesthetics themselves can be repackaged, such that one era's great artworks look like mere trinkets to those of the next.

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